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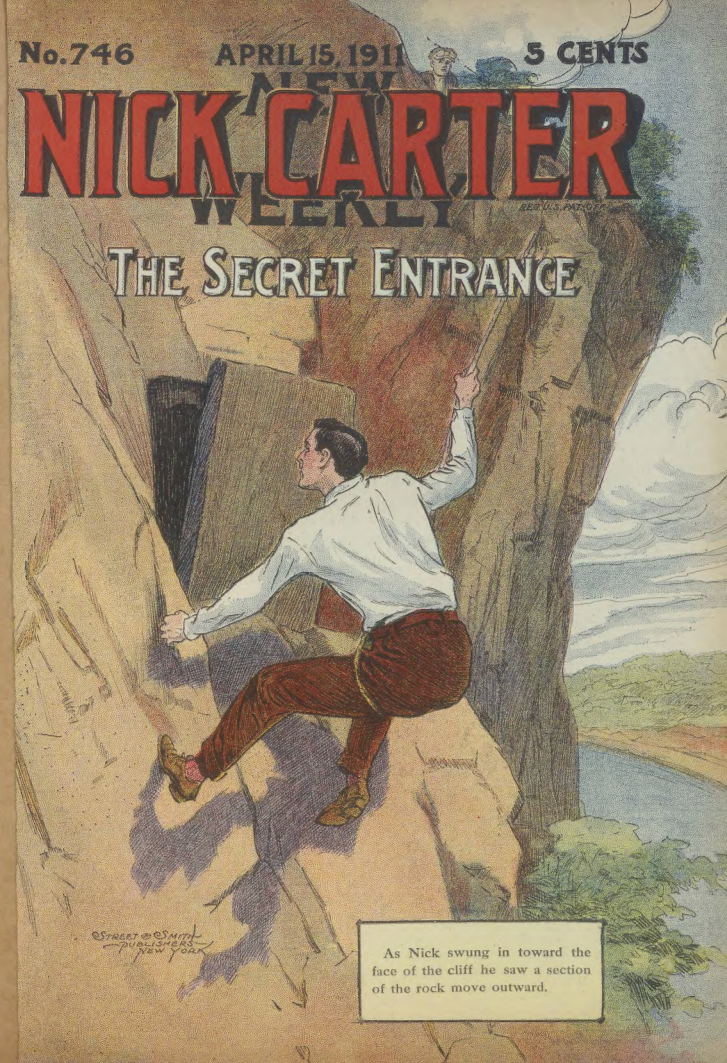
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

THE SECRET ENTRANCE



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As Nick swung in toward the face of the cliff he saw a section of the rock move outward.

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THE SECRET ENTRANCE;

OR,

Nick Carter and the Child Stealers.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

LOST: TWO CHILDREN.

Men come this far. Men stop. Men go no far-
r. Men go up in air, mebbe. Whshhhh; just like
Me don't know. No trail. Jack Rabbit give
p, Big Chief Carter."

Nick Carter looked at his companion and smiled.

"Anyhow, you have done well to bring me this far,
," he said, in a kindly tone. "It is what you
ld call a heap more than I could have done my-
We will go back now. I don't think there is
thing more that we can do here at the present time."

The Indian—for Nick's companion was an Indian,
ough you might not have thought it if you had been
ding, behind him, and had noticed only his cos-
e, and the thick, straight black hair of him, for he
dressed like any other denizen of civilization,
in the latest fashion, at that—nodded his head
erturbably.

The environment would have scouted the idea that
k Carter's companion of the moment was an In-
an, for they were not a score of miles from New York City; that is, not much in excess of that, at least.

The detective had been engaged upon a most puzzling case for more than a week, and that morning he had decided that he was no farther advanced toward the solution of the mystery than he had been in the very beginning.

And then, on the street, in New York, he had met Jack-Rabbit—or Jack Rabbit, as he very much preferred to be called, with the emphasis on the latter name instead of upon the former one; and Jack happened to be an old acquaintance of the detective's; one that he had made very long ago, at a time when he was working up a case in the far West.

Jack, in former days, when he had worn feathers and buckskin, had been a noted trailer in his tribe; a trailer whose reputation had been general among all other Indians with whom he had been in contact.

But prosperity had come to Jack, and stayed with him; and Jack had gone East, to see the sights, and to spend some of his wealth in finding out things that

the white race did; and, on the second morning of his stay in New York, he had met Nick Carter on the street, as we have already described.

The pleasure arising from that meeting was mutual, and Nick had at once taken the Indian under his wing, so to speak, having no thought at the time that he would make use of the former chief among his own people.

And then the idea had come to the detective that the Indian would supply the very thing he needed in following up the case he had in hand.

"You're the very last man that I would pick out, now, for a Ute chief, Jack," he had said to his old friend. "Have you forgotten your old talent of trailing?"

"Me forget? No. Me just as good as ever," responded the Indian.

"Well," said Nick, "I have been trying for a week to pick up a trail that was several days old when I began upon it, so it's nearly two weeks old now. Do you think you could help me out with it, Jack?"

"Me don't know. Me try."

"Will you try for me?"

"Yes, Chief Carter; but me don't know much 'bout trails in this part of the country. It ain't same as my own."

"I know. It's a mighty sight different; but all the same, your old talent may help me to find just the things that I cannot discover for myself. Will you try it for me?"

"Sure. Me try."

"First, then," said the detective, "you shall come to my house and be my guest while you are in the city. No hotels for yours, where the people will all stare at you the minute it is known that you are a Ute Indian."

"Huh; people fools 'bout that," said Jack.

"I'll admit all that, Jack. But they will stare—particularly at a Ute or a Sioux. Now, come back to the house with me and we will smoke the pipe of good-fellowship the first thing. Then I will tell you about the case, and you shall help me with it. What do you say to that?"

"Me mighty glad," was the uncompromising reply.

"I always liked you, Jack, and aside from the fact that you can help me, as I believe, I am very glad to see you again, and to have you for my guest at the house."

"Me like you, too, Big Chief Carter," replied Jack, with the nearest approach to a smile that his placid but handsome countenance ever made.

Then, in Nick Carter's study, somewhat later, while Nick smoked a cigar and the Indian puffed composedly at a pipe that Nick gave to him, the detective told him about the case.

"There is a man who lives here in New York, whose name is Sabino," he said. "He is an Italian by descent, although his parents were both born in this country; and as we count it, he is as much of an American as we are."

The Indian nodded comprehendingly.

"Otono Sabino is a very rich man. He is a banker, and large sums of money are deposited with him by Italians, to keep for them; and, as I said, he has become a very rich man himself. He is a comparatively young man, too—about your age—somewhere about thirty years old."

The Indian nodded again, listening closely; and Nick knew that Jack would remember every word that was told to him, as literally as if it had all been written down and he had studied and learned it at heart.

"Mr. Sabino has two children," the detective continued; "a boy and a girl. The name of the boy is Carmino, and the name of the girl is Lucia—Carmino and Lucia Sabino."

Another nod.

"The boy is six years old, the girl is four. They are beautiful children, and very intelligent for their years. A week ago last Wednesday they were kidnaped; not at the——"

"What is kidnaped?" the Indian interrupted. "Me don't know that word."

"They were stolen away from their father and mother. They were taken away somewhere to be hidden, and kept from their parents until those parents, or until Mr. Sabino should pay out a large sum of money for their return to him," explained the detective.

"Me understand now."

"I was about to say that the two children were not at the same place when they were stolen. They were not together at the time; but both were stolen at the same hour, and under circumstances that were almost the same. Understand that, Jack?"

"Yes."

"It happened like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky, so far as Mr. Sabino was concerned. Usually, when a kidnaping plot is in progress, by that class of people which is commonly known as the Black Hand——"

"Black Hand; what is that, Chief Carter?"

"I was about to explain. It is a name that is

rally given to a class of local outlaws and rene-
es, who prey upon their own countrymen, in one
or another. You will understand as I proceed."
nother nod.
' was about to tell you that it is the customary
g among that class to threaten before they act; but
his case Sabino had not received a single threat,
he had no cause to suppose that he or his children
ld be molested, because he has always been very
l to his people, and has never hesitated to help
when they have needed his assistance."
Me understand."
Nevertheless, the children were stolen—at about
same hour; one, the girl, from Mr. Sabino's car-
e, as it was being driven through Central Park;
e the boy was taken from its nurse—the squaw
had charge of it at the time—while she left it
he door of a drug store, while she stepped inside
make a purchase."
How boy took, Chief Carter?"
He was looking at some things that were dis-
ed in the window of the store. The nurse was in
e to buy something inside the store. She said
he little fellow: 'Wait here, Carmino;' he said
' and she went on inside the store. She was gone
more than three or four minutes, but when she
e out again the boy had disappeared. But that
t the part of the case that you care about."
Yes. Me care. You tell," was the imperturb-
reply.
Very well."
How disappear?"
Only another child, not much older than Carmino,
l tell that. It was a girl, and she happened to be
only one who saw it. She said that an automobile
u know what that is, Jack?"
es, me know."
n automobile stopped at the curb, just around the
r, and two men got out. One of them approached
lino, while the other stood near by, looking on.
first man said to the boy: 'Papa is waiting in
ar. Papa wants little Carmino.' He spoke in
sh."
k Rabbit nodded.
he boy went with the man to the car; the second
followed. All entered the car, and it was driven
"
here to?"
Will come to that later, Jack."
ow girl stolen away, big chief?"

"The children had two Shetland ponies—little horses, so high, Jack—and a small cart, with seats at the sides—so. Mr. Sabino lives in one of the side streets, uptown, near Fifth Avenue, and close to the park; and it is not far from one of the entrances to the park. It had been agreed that both nurses were to take the children for a ride in the park that afternoon, behind the ponies, but at the last moment Carmino and the nurse who had charge of him decided not to go. They went walking instead, and so to the store where the boy was stolen. The other nurse, with the little girl, went in the pony cart to the park."

"Me understand now."

"They had not driven far when, at a turn in the road, an automobile—and it was not the same one, mind you; I know that for a fact already—was driven past them, and then directly in front of them, and stopped. The pony cart had to stop, too, of course."

"Me understand."

"As in the other case, two men got out of the automobile, went back to the cart, and while one of the men reached over and clapped a handkerchief, saturated with chloroform, over the nose and mouth of the nurse, the other man seized the little girl—and that is all that the nurse could tell us. But I have traced both of those kidnaping parties to a certain spot, and there I lose the trail. It is right there, at that spot, where I think that your talents can help me."

CHAPTER II.

THE INDIAN TRAILER.

"I won't take up the time to tell you all the particulars of the beginning of my search for the kidnapers," said the detective, in that preliminary conversation with Jack. "I will just glance over the points that will bring me up to the place where I am now, in the hunt, and where I think that you can help me.

"The little girl at the store, who saw the boy taken away, gave me a fairly good description of the two men who were there—and she remembered enough about the car so that I did succeed in tracing it, for a time.

"The nurse who was in the pony cart, in the park, when the girl was stolen, was able to give me a fairly good description of the two men she saw there, and of the automobile in which they took the girl away; and I succeeded in tracing that, too, for a time; and to the same place to which I have traced the other one."

"Same automobile?"

"No. Different one. The first one was a covered car—what we call a limousine body; the one in the park was a touring car—with an open tonneau. Do you understand all of that, Jack?"

"Me understand; yes."

"But the description of the men—of the two at the store and of the two in the park—was the same; so much the same, that if I did not know that it is impossible, I should have said that both abductions were conducted by the same men."

"Why impossible, big chief?"

"Because I have figured the time very carefully, and I find that the children were kidnaped, at points that were nearly a mile apart, within five minutes of the same time."

Another nod.

"Well, Jack, I took up those two trails, in ways that I have, here in the city, for following trails, and——"

"No tracks, eh?"

"No; nor what you call signs; but signs all the same, that are very different from the kind you are used to."

"Me know."

"I succeeded in following them, too, for quite a distance; out into the country, where there are woods, and all that. I have done it by asking questions, and doing a lot of little things that you would not comprehend at all; but I have reached a point in the woods, out there at the place I have mentioned, where I lose the trail altogether. It is to that place that I want to take you."

"Why? Trail is very old now."

"Yes. But I am convinced that I have reached a point where, if I can fill in a small space, I will be able to go ahead again. As it is, I am up against a blank wall."

"Blank wall? Me no know about blank walls. We go there, Chief Carter?"

"Yes. Whenever you are ready to go, Jack."

"Go now."

The detective ordered Danny around with the car, and they were driven to the place to which the detective had referred—to a place across the river, in New Jersey, which need not at the present time be specified, more than to say that it is in that region which is generally described as being along the Palisades, and back of them.

Nick, with the Indian, left the car at a four corners, and Danny was told to wait.

"Now, Jack," the detective said, "I succeeded tracing both of those cars—the one in which the was carried away, and the one in which the little was carried away—to this corner. Right here is wh I have entirely lost the trail."

"Both cars stopped here?" the Indian asked.

"Yes; and turned around, and returned to the cit or toward it."

"Mebbe carried papooses back again."

"No. I do not think that; nor do I think they met here by other conveyances. I think—and it is a guess, Jack—that both children were taken the cars, at this point, and carried, perhaps in the of the men, from here to some place of hiding th near at hand. That is not very far from wher are standing now."

"Me understand. Why think that?"

"There is a point about the two cars that I not told you yet. I have found both of them."

"How's that, chief?"

"Both cars had been stolen for the occasion; were standing in front of their owners' house points about half a mile apart, when they were t They were stolen while the chauffeurs, who had driving them, happened to be out of their cars inside the respective houses, for a few moments. cars were driven away from the owners' houses in manner."

"And then, chief?"

"They were used for the kidnaping; they too children; one from the drug store, and the othe from the park; they were driven through the pa One Hundred and Tenth Street—you see, I them—and thence to the same ferry that we crossed; then to this very corner. They must ha rived here very nearly at the same moment. here the cars were turned around—I plainly fou traces of that fact—and driven back across the to New York. In New York, both were abando the streets; one at the corner of Broadway an Hundred and Twenty-fourth Street; the other corner of Broadway and One Hundred and Four Street; but you don't know about localities in th Jack."

"How far apart?"

"Half a mile."

"How soon?"

"How soon after they were here, at this corne

"Yes."

"As nearly as I can figure it, within two

id probably within an hour of the time I think they ust have left the children here, Jack."

"You want me to hunt trail from here?"

"Yes."

"What is there? and there? and there? and there?" ked the Indian, pointing, as he spoke each time, rth, east, south, and west, but indicating directions every side of them.

"That is the very question that I asked of myself, once, as soon as I had determined in my mind what have already told to you," replied the detective, with smile.

"What did you do?"

"I started from here, in a straight line north, until had gone a rifle shot away; then I made a circuit ll the way around to that point again."

The Indian nodded with emphasis.

"Good," he said. "What find?"

"Out there"—Nick pointed eastwardly—"just this de of the top of the bluff that overlooks the river, is e ruin of an old hotel that was burned down years go, but not entirely destroyed. Bushes and trees ve grown up around it, until the place is now almost accessible. I came back later, and searched it very oroughly, but could find no sign of the presence of ybody there. I could not find that the ruin had en visited at all, by another than myself, recently ough to have left any trail."

"What out there?" asked the Indian, waving his n toward the west.

"Out there, half a mile away, is another old house; deserted one, built of bricks, that has fallen into a in. Part of the roof has caved in. There is not a om left in the house that is habitable for a dog, so r as shelter from the weather is concerned. But I arched the neighborhood of it, nevertheless—and und nothing."

The Indian waved his arm again.

"To the northward," said the detective, "there is thing that is interesting—from my point of view. the north, half a mile farther on, there is a stone use, that stands back from the road. A doctor lives re, who takes nervous people to care for them. It what is called a sanitarium, on a small scale; to the th of us there is nothing at all."

Jack waved one of his arms all the way around the cle, and asked:

"Farther away—what?"

"Nothing at all to interest us."

"Why no think took papooses away from here with ses, after they took 'em from the other things?"

"Just guesswork. Just a hunch, Jack. They may have been taken on and on, to any distance from here, for all I know—only I don't think they were. I believe that those kids are somewhere near here, at this moment."

Jack Rabbit nodded as if he thought so, too. Then he turned slowly around until he had completed a circle, as if he were waiting for some sort of an inspiration; and at the end of it he said:

"Now me look for trail. You wait here?"

"No; unless you had rather I would not do so, I will trail along after you. I want to see you at work again."

"Huh; too many clothes for good work. Come along," he said.

He strode down the road toward the south, a distance of thirty rods or less, and then turned abruptly into the woods; but, the moment he had passed the edge of the roadway, his entire demeanor underwent a change.

He became all Indian again, notwithstanding the costume of civilization that he wore.

He bent over forward until he was nearly doubled, and his keen black eyes began to search the ground at every point near to him that was in advance of the direction he was going; and that direction, after a few moments, Nick discovered to be in a circle that would eventually bring them back again to the starting point.

It was the same thing that Nick Carter had done, precisely, only it was done differently and perhaps more thoroughly.

Trailing a man through woods that are in the midst of a populous district, where any person may pass, is an entirely different sort of stunt from searching for a trail in a wilderness where human feet rarely tread —where a broken or a bent twig may mean a fruitful discovery.

The Indian was aware of that, of course, and Nick left him entirely alone, not venturing even to make a suggestion.

He knew very well indeed that Jack was following out some thought which took all of the supposedly insurmountable difficulties into consideration; he had not told what that idea might be, and the detective was content to wait until he was ready to do so.

More than once, as the Indian went on, he stopped and bent close to the ground, studying it with scrutinizing care; but each time he shook his head, and went on again.

There were places where the ground was soft and

yielding; there were places where they passed over smooth, hard rock; there were cleared spaces where there was grass growing—rank grass that grows in such cleared spaces of a woods; there were places where the bushes were thick, and where they had to force their way through them, but the Indian never deviated from the course he had mapped out.

Nick thought it strange that he would force his way through brush which such men as those they were trailing would naturally avoid, but he said nothing, knowing that Jack was working according to rule, and was following out a plan.

And the moment came at last, when, after a closer examination of the ground than usual, the Indian straightened up and said:

"Two men; two squaws. Huh!"

CHAPTER III.

WHERE THE TRAIL ENDED.

The detective seated himself upon a shelf of rock that was covered with moss, near him, and took a cigar from his pocket.

"Let's rest a moment, and talk it over, Jack," he said. "'Two men; two squaws; huh;' what does the 'huh' mean?"

Jack seated himself upon a stump, and accepted one of the detective's cigars, which he lighted with deliberation, and, which he smoked in silence for a time, before he replied; but Nick, knowing his man, waited with patience. He knew that Jack would express the result of his thoughts presently, and that the expression would be very much to the point.

For himself, with all his shrewdness in such matters, and after all the experience he had had in all parts of the world, he could see nothing that would have resulted in as much as the Indian had already said: "Two men; two squaws."

He could see that at some time persons had passed that way—at least there were some faint traces of indentations upon the gray moss which would indicate that much; but as to the number and the character of those persons, there was no evidence that he could recognize. That was why he had jumped at the idea of taking Jack Rabbit to that spot.

"Two men; two women; one man carried something; one woman carried something. Two men stopped here; waited for two women; went on before women got here; women did not stop for rest—yet."

Then he smoked on again in silence.

"One woman, big woman; heavier than men; other woman, little woman, no weight at all," he remarked presently; and smoked on some more.

Ten minutes passed in utter silence, for Nick knew better than to interrupt Jack while Jack was figuring his facts together. He waited.

At the expiration of the ten minutes, Jack threw away his half-smoked cigar, and started to his feet.

"You wait here; me go back, along back trail first," he said; and started.

The detective remained where he was, thinking.

The burden of his thoughts was that Jack Rabbit knew very well indeed what he was about. He knew that the Indian would not have made the emphatic statements he had made, unless he was positive about them. He knew, too, that Jack could see such things where they would be utterly invisible to less trained eyes.

More, even though much time had passed since the traces had been left there, even though rain had fallen in the meantime, and the wind had blown, and leaves had drifted down from the branches overhead, it was not likely that other feet than those which Jack had discovered traces of had left tracks at that spot.

Jack went away from the spot where Nick was resting and smoking, bent almost double, and with his eyes fixed, inch by inch, upon every foot of the ground over which he traveled; and with one hand and then the other, stretched out before him, lifting a leaf here, removing a twig there, smoothing out a bit of moss in another place, to see if it would spring back again to the place from which he had moved it, and so he drifted out of sight.

He was gone so long a time that even Nick Carter, knowing the man as well as he did, began to get impatient; but he did come at last, after nearly an hour.

But, even then, all that he had to say was:

"Wait here, big chief; be back soon."

This time the Indian went in the opposite direction, following the trail ahead, and he was absent even a longer time than before. It must be remembered that in that sort of trailing progress is very slow.

Sometimes Jack would consume ten minutes in traversing as many feet; at other times he would cover a rod or more in a minute or two.

When he did return to where Nick awaited him, he seated himself again upon the stump, and reached out his hand for another cigar, which Nick supplied.

And then he smoked in silence, as he had done before, for a very long time indeed.

When he did speak, it was to the point.

"Two men left the road and stepped into the woods, farther south than where you said the automobiles stopped. Carried something across the ditch, into the bushes—probably the papooses; put 'em down; went back to road; came back to bushes again, followed by two women—the big one and the little one. Muddy then; very muddy then."

"That's right," said Nick. "There had been heavy rains, and the roads were not yet very dry."

Jack continued as if he had not heard the interruption.

"Big woman picked up one papoose; one man took other one. Bimeby other man took child from the woman, and carried it. Bimeby, after that, big woman took other kid—one man had been carrying, and carried it. Know by tracks. Found plenty tracks, different places. You no see, but I see."

"I know. Go on, Jack. This is great."

"Bimeby again, both men carried kids—you call 'em kids; I do the same—women walked behind. Sometimes stepped in tracks made by men. Women sat down to rest, once, and picked ferns, and pulled 'em apart. Saw 'em."

"I might have discovered that much, if I had seen the place," said the detective, with a smile.

"You no see it 'less I show it to you, mebbe. Women all behind. Men waited for 'em here; then went on."

"Never mind all the particulars now, Jack," said the detective, with just a little show of impatience. "You have found the trail, all right. Where does it lead to?"

"Edge of bluff, over the river."

"Where after that?"

"Nowhere."

"They didn't jump over the edge of the bluff, did they?"

"Don't know."

"What sort of ground is it there, Jack?"

"No ground at all. Rock."

"Well, perhaps they just turned there, in another direction?"

"No turn in any direction. Stopped there."

"Went over the edge of the bluff with a rope, maybe."

"No rope. Nothing at all. Big flat rock. Soft ground all around it. Little hollows, where damp remains, and grass grows; where dead leaves have fallen. No tracks away from there anywhere."

"Shall we go there? I'd like to have a look at the place."

"Yes—bimeby. Wanta think."

"All right. Think away—only it's getting late."

"Plenty time. Must find trail after top of rock on the bluff."

"That's the idea, if you think you can reason it out; but while you are doing that, I might go down to the bottom of the bluff, and look around there a bit."

For reply the Indian threw away the cigar—an Indian never smokes while he is in action—and rose to his feet again.

"Come on," he said; and he led the way, walking rapidly, straight toward the east, not following the line of the trail as he had done before.

"Men and women went that way, and then that way, and then more so, and then brought up—there," he said, pointing ahead of him; and came out at the top of the bluff where it overlooked the Hudson River, and where the view, if they had cared to study it, was one of the most magnificent sights in this section of the world.

Jack strode directly to the middle of the flat rock he had mentioned, and said:

"Two men and two women, carrying two kids, came here. Stopped here. Men come this far; men stop; men go no farther."

"What about the women?" asked Nick.

"Just the same. Women come here. Women go no farther. Go up in the air, mebbe."

"Or over the edge of the cliff; eh?"

"No sign of that, Chief Carter."

"Have you looked?"

"Me look. No sign. No go over bluff. Don't think."

"How, then, did they get away from here?"

"Don't know. Jack Rabbit give it up. We wait. You look."

He reached out a demanding hand for a third cigar, and seated himself on the rock, with his arms clasped around his knees, and began, stolidly, to smoke like a furnace chimney.

The detective left him to his thoughts.

Farther to the north of where the detective was standing, less than a quarter of a mile away, but hidden from view by higher rocks and by trees, was the burned ruin of that old hotel that he had mentioned to Jack.

All the way along there, for a long distance in either direction, the bluff was high and steep; con-

cave, in many places, along the surface of it; utterly unscalable at any point within half a mile in either direction. Nick knew that.

But he walked along the edge of the cliff, first one way and then the other, nevertheless looking for signs that he did not find.

He knew that the Indian would wait for him, no matter how long a time he might be absent, and on the occasion of one of his former visits to the spot he had discovered a spot at which, he now thought, he might be able to reach the shore of the river at the foot of the cliff.

He went to it at a dogtrot. He swung himself over the edge, onto a ledge of rock; and then down to another, clinging as best he could, as he descended, and so, at last, worked his way to the bottom.

Then he returned along the edge of the water, searching the shore as he walked, and also the face of the cliffs, and the top—and he continued for a long distance past the place that was even with the point at which he had left Jack at the top.

He had been gone more than an hour when he finally returned to the Indian, to find that Jack was still seated as he had left him, although the cigar had been a long time consumed.

And then it was that the Indian uttered the eight sentences with which this story was begun; and then it was that Nick replied that they might as well return to the city, as there was nothing more to be accomplished there at that moment.

It was getting late; that was the reason for the remark.

But Jack sat very still where he was.

"No go," he said. "Stay here."

"Stay here? What for?"

"Don't know. Wait. Maybe something happen. Maybe flying machine come down bimeby;" and he permitted himself to grin broadly.

Nick seated himself, facing the Indian, and produced two more cigars.

"These will give out pretty soon, Jack," he said, "if we stay here too long. These two are the last of the Mohicans."

"Mohicans? Indians, eh? No good. Too long gone. Me Ute. Utes good. Now what?"

"You said wait. What are we waiting for?"

"Stay here, Chief Carter. Camp out. Make fire. Stay all night. Then see. Men here, mebbe somewhere. Kids here, mebbe, too. Don't know where. Up in the sky? Mebbeso. Down inside the rock? Mebbeso. Wait and see. You stay?"

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN THERE WAS NO OTHER WAY.

Nick Carter had heard of "camping on a trail"—who has not?—but Jack-Rabbit's idea in carrying o the plan had a literalness about it that was rath appalling.

Yet it was summer—just after midsummer, in fa The day had been warm and pleasant, if not too h at times; the night bade fair to be as balmy. The was nothing to prevent their staying there, if th wanted to do so, save the absence of food and drin and the other discomforts that would go with them.

But behind the suggestion made by Jack, Nick kn that there was a thought, although the Indian had n seen fit to mention it as yet.

However, he would do so when he was good a ready, and when it had matured in his mind sufficient for him to think it worth while. That is one go thing about an Indian; he never decides a thing i pulsively. He likes to smoke, and think it over. The have been times, too, when it was not a good thi about him.

Presently, after they had smoked in silence until t cigars were nearly consumed—and truth to tell, the d tective was rapidly losing his patience, because he d not feel that there was much call to exercise it, Ja spoke.

When he did so, he seemed rather to be talking himself than to Nick, although it was plain that wished Nick to hear what he had been thinking.

And this is what he said, while Nick listened silence:

"Two men steal boy in front of store. Two m steal girl from little cart, in the park. Each two m steal automobile. One two men carry boy away; c two men carry girl away; both two men bring here. Where find women?

"Women wait somewhere while four men st boy and girl. Where wait?

"Women not in automobiles—automobiles stol Women picked up by two men in one automobile, a by two men in other automobile. Where? T side river? Other side river? Me think this side

"One man of both two men take automobiles ba again; one man of both two men, with the two wom bring kids here to this rock. What do then?

"Go up in air? No good; couldn't. Go down o cliff? No good; couldn't. Go along top of cl somewhere else? No. Didn't do that.

"Fly away? No wings; couldn't.

"Tie rope to tree, and swing 'emselves over soft
nces, so's not to make tracks? No rope; no trees
r that sort of thing; couldn't do it.
"Jump with pole from rock to rock, to leave no
acks? Not with kids; couldn't; and squaws couldn't
it, anyhow.
"Where go? How go? Just one way. Must go
st one way, 'cause didn't go any other way.
"Must go down into ground through rock; no other
ay. Rock loose somewhere? Must be; no other
ay."
The Indian started to his feet, and stood before the
tective, pointing straight down through the face of
e flat rock upon which he was standing.
"You see?" he demanded. "Down there; in ground;
rough rock; no other way."
"Nonsense, Jack."
"Men go there. Men take women there. Men take
ds there. No other way."
"But, man alive, that flat rock, even if it were only
few inches thick, would weigh tons and tons."
"Me know. Men down there, just the same."
Nick jumped up and down upon the rock, striking
with his heels; it was as solid as the cliff itself. Then
laughed aloud.
"It is a good theory, all right, as theories generally
," he said, seating himself again, "but it is a little
remote for us just now. Try again, Jack."
"No use try again. No other way. Men didn't
there"—he pointed toward the north—"men didn't
there"—he pointed south—"men didn't go there"—
pointed toward the direction from which they had
me—"men didn't go there"—he pointed across the
er—"men didn't go there"—he pointed toward the
s—"men did go there"—he pointed straight down
ough the face of the rock again. "Jack Rabbit has
oken."
Nick realized that the Indian was determined in the
clusion at which he had arrived.
To humor him, the detective rose to his feet again,
d began an exhaustive examination of the flat rock.
walked all around it—and it was nearly a hundred
t long by half as many wide, although of an ir-
gular shape; and it was seamed, and creased, and
cked, too, in many places; there were deep hol-
s in the surface of it which still held some indica-
ns of moisture.
At the edges, where it disappeared, it did not come
an end, but merely dippered under the soil that had
thered atop of it.

Back a little way from the edge of the cliff, two or three hundred feet, there were some bushes. Here and there were stunted and deformed trees, made so by the rough winds they had been compelled to contend with all their lives.

All around it, on every side save the river one, there was soil and moss where tracks would have remained for the Indian to have discovered them had they been made by the men who had stolen the children.

The detective returned to the Indian, and resumed his seat near him.

"Try again, Jack," he said. "Or shall I try?"

"You try."

"Well, there might have been a boat down there, on the river; and there might——"

"No good. No use. You make fun now," said Jack.

"Well, the men got away from here somehow, Jack."

The Indian nodded toward the rock upon which he was seated, with his arms locked around his knees.

"No good, to use your own words," said the detective, laughing. "It couldn't be done. It is impossible."

"Listen," said Jack.

"Well? What?"

"Once, many moons—years I mean—ago, I was very young; like the boy kid that has been stolen. My father was a great chief—Gray Feather. Bad man come to our tepee—bad white-face man; no good. Renegade. Him and Gray Feather not like each other. White face named Hawley—Big Hawley—Renegade; outlaw. Thief. You know?"

"Yes."

"Gray Feather find that Hawley murder one of his braves. Gray Feather tie Hawley to the stake to burn him. Hawley beg hard, and Gray Feather let up on him. Then Hawley sent away from village with no gun, no powder, no anything. See?"

"Yes. What is it all about?"

"You see bimeby. Big Hawley start away. That night he sneak back. He like the Indian in moving without sound. He steal into tepee. He steal me; little kid; so high. See?"

"Yes."

"I fight him, bite him, claw him; no good. He hold on. Take me away, south; among the big hills and the mountains. My father, Great Chief Gray Feather, he take the trail and follow Hawley. You see?"

"I see. You were kidnaped, too, when you were young."

"Yes. Gray Feather follow Hawley's trail over hills and mountains, through valleys, and across rocks; everywhere; finally follow into cañon; high rocks, like this. You see?"

"I see."

"Stream flow through cañon. Far up deep cañon there is a big waterfall. Me been there many times since to see it."

"Go on. It's a good story, anyway, Jack."

"You wait. You see. Big Hawley crawled out waterfall, on the trail. Rocks—high rocks everywhere, only where water come down. No way getting past them; no way getting through them. No trail back from there; no climb cliffs; no fly, no anyway but through water of the big falls. Gray Feather wait."

"Well?"

"He wait with twelve braves, one day, two days, three days; no good. Then he send braves away and he wait alone. He hide himself away behind some of the loose rocks, and wait all alone, one day, two days, three days, four days—week. Then—then he find out."

"What did he find?"

"Hawley."

"How did he find him?" asked Nick, realizing that Jack wanted to be asked the question.

"Hawley come through the water: hollow log."

"What do you mean? Tell me about it."

"Hollow log, thirty feet, hollow all the way through. Big iron chain fastened to one end of it, behind the falls, so's it can't get away. Other end pushed through the falls, till it reached way out beyond where the falling water fell. Chain held it there, so's it couldn't get away. You see?"

"Yes; I think so."

"Big hollow log in the water swished and swayed this way and that way, like that, and lots of water in the hollow of it, too, but not enough to drown Hawley. He held his breath while he crawled through it to get out."

"Oh, yes, that may be all right, but a little chap like you were, six years old, couldn't have held your breath to go through that log, Jack."

"You wait. You see. Big Hawley crawled out. He had a lariat in his hand; rawhide. He tied one end of it to a ring in the lower end of the log, and then he pulled it tight, so's the end of the log was out of the water on the shell of the beach. My father watching all the time. You see?"

"Yes."

"This all true. Gray Feather wait, because he was to see me, Jack Rabbit; it is not pronounced that way in the Ute language."

"I know."

"No water in the hollow log now. Hawley tie fast, and then crawl back through it, and so through the falls. You see?"

"Yes."

"Bimeby he crawl back again—with me, and he stand out on the shell of the beach, and he stand up straight and he laughed. But that was his last laugh. Gray Feather shot him, and scalped him, and threw him into the water and let him float away. Then he hugged me close to him. Then he crawled through the log himself."

"And found a cave behind the falls, eh?"

"Found a big place behind the falls; went way back into the mountains, and finally came out again, at an other entrance. Hawley might have gone out that way, only he didn't. Now, you see? Same here, Chief Carter. Two men and two women, with two kids, have no other way to go but through that rocky We think they cannot do it, but they did do it. You see? My father thought the same about the falling water, but he waited. He said no other way, and he waited; then he found Hawley. I say no other way here, and I wait. Bimeby I find two men, and two women, and two kids. You no wait if you don't want to. I wait. What my father, the Gray Feather, did his son, the Jack Rabbit, can do."

"By Jove, Jack, it sounds good; only, you see, is of no use. This is different."

"No difference. Just the same. You wait. You see."

"Well, for a stubborn chief of the Utes, you take the bakery, Jack."

"Never mind. Me wait here."

CHAPTER V.

SOME WAY THROUGH THE ROCK.

To sit out on the top of a cliff overlooking the Hudson River, for an indefinite time, waiting for nothing that was tangible, and merely to gaze at the stars as they appeared, was not an idea exactly to the liking of the detective.

He would have been willing to wait there indefinitely, of course, had there been any sound and plausible reason for doing so; but to wait for nothing—

s totally out of the question; and yet he knew that
ck Rabbit was perfectly serious in what he had said.
"What is your idea, Jack? Tell me that, for what-
er it is, we have got to be getting a move on us. It
ll be dark in half an hour or so."
"Better dark than light—to wait and watch."
"Will it satisfy you if we make another examina-
n of the surface of the rock? We can make it
gether this time."
"No good. I have already searched it."
"Well, then?"
"But, even though the eyes of Jack Rabbit cannot
d it, there is a way through the big rock," he in-
ted; and Nick laughed aloud, in very perplexity of
irit. He had not counted upon any such exhibition
stubbornness as this.
He rose to his feet again, and began still another
rch of the flat face of the rock.
He unclasped his knife, and thrust the blade of it
o each seam and crack that he could find; and
ally he got down flat and crawled to the very edge
the precipice, so that he could look over it into
abyss below.
Just there the top of the cliff shelved outward, so
t, as he looked over, there was a straight fall be-
ith him, all the way to the bottom. If he had hung
string over the abyss, and tied a weight to it, it
uld have extended straight downward, like a plumb
e; and it would have touched the pebbles at the base
the cliff, fully twenty feet out from it, too.
"Come here, Jack, and sit on my legs," he called out.
want to look still farther over, and I haven't any
mach for falling down there."
The Indian came, and seized the detective by the
kles, with his sinewy fingers, and Nick reached his
ad and shoulders as far out as he dared.
When he withdrew his head, he got upon his feet
d walked back to the place where he had been seated.
"It's no use, Jack," he said. "I'd like to humor
u, but it's no use. There is absolutely nothing there,
it I can see, that indicates anything at all. You
ght just as well sit up on top of the Flatiron Build-
g over in New York, and wait for those kidnapers,
to wait here. It isn't a bit of use."
"Me wait," said the Indian stolidly. "You go. Me
it."
"But I don't want to leave you here alone, with noth-
g to eat—and I'll be jiggered if I'm going to stay
re to-night for nothing at all."
"You bring food. Me wait," was the stolid an-
wer.

"Blowed if I will. I'm not coming back here again to-night. Come; Danny is waiting out there in the road for us, and we'll go home to dinner."

Again the Indian gestured around him, north, south, east, and west, and then straight upward.

"They couldn't go that way, nor that way, nor that way, nor that way, nor that way," he said calmly, "so they went that way," and he pointed downward through the rock. "Me wait."

"All right. I won't," said Nick. "You'll be some hungry by morning, and will be glad to come across the river to your breakfast."

"No. Me wait, one day, two days, a week; me wait. You bring food."

"Well, I'll be blessed if you aren't the limit, Jack. All right. You may as well be here, looking at the scenery, as learning how to be a rounder, over in the city. I'll either bring some food to you, in the morning, or I will send it. When you get quite tired of this kind of vacation, you come home. Good night."

"Good night, Chief Carter. You come in the morning?"

"Yes; if that will do you any good, I will come in the morning."

He turned away again, but Jack called to him.

"Wait," he said.

The Indian left his seat upon the rock and walked toward a stunted oak that grew just back of the edge of the flat rock. It was a twisted and gnarled specimen of growth, and standing beside it, he could easily reach the lower branches, which were half dead.

"You look, Chief Carter," he said.

"Well?"

"If I am not here, you read the message I leave, from this tree. You see?"

"Go ahead."

"This little branch I will break off right there if I have found another trail, and have gone to follow it. I will break it near the end—right here—if I have gone north; in the middle if I have gone west; short off if I have gone south, and I will leave a trail."

"Yes."

"If I see anything, or hear anything which makes me go back into the woods, so that I may miss you, but will return here afterward, I will break this branch;" indicating another one.

"All right. I can read those signs."

"And—look—do you see this sharp crotch in the tree, right here?"

"Yes."

"I take this piece of rock, no bigger than three of my fingers. I put it there, at the base of the tree, where I can reach it. You see?"

"Yes."

"If anything happens which means danger in any form, there will be time for me to put that stone into the crotch of the tree. I shall sleep at the base of it, with my back against its trunk. You will remember?"

"Yes."

"If anything happens, which is like danger, so that I may not have time to break off the branches as I have said, there will still be time to put that stone into the crotch of the tree. If you find it there, and I am not here, and there is no other sign—what will you understand by that?"

"That you are in some sort of danger, somewhere near here?"

"No."

"What then?"

"That I have seen the men, or the women, or the kids; that I have discovered that there is a secret entrance through the rock; that I have been overpowered and taken there, or—that I have discovered the secret of the entrance, and have followed into it."

"I'm very much afraid it's all poppycock, Jack."

"Mebbeso. But if I am not here when you return, and if the stone is in the crotch of the tree, you will know that I have not left the region of the rock, any farther than this, and that I have gone through it, as those men went through it."

"All right," said Nick, laughing. "Good night. I hate to leave you here, Jack."

"No matter for that. I am used to the open, Chief Carter."

"Better change your mind, and come along with me."

"No. Me stay here."

"So long, then."

"So long," was the solemn reply.

That evening Nick Carter went to see his client, Otono Sabino.

"There are a few points that I want to discuss with you, Mr. Sabino," he said, "in regard to the identity of those kidnapers. But, first, have you received any more letters?"

"Yes," was the reply. "One came this afternoon, by five-o'clock delivery."

"Let me see it."

Nick took the letter, which had been posted in Hoboken, and read in silence:

"Carmino and Lucia are well, but not happy. They mourn for their father and their mother. They cry a good deal, for it is not very light where they are compelled to stay, and Carmino says that he is afraid of the fairies. No harm will come to them for another week, but after that we will be obliged to neglect them unless you have given us an earnest of your intention. You have already been instructed how to deliver the money to us, and need not be told again. The way is safe enough, if you follow your instructions; and if you do not, your children will be forever lost to you. We are not cruel, we are only insistent. You can well spare the fifty thousand dollars that we demand. Just one word more: We have watched the efforts of Nick Carter to trace us, with interest. He must be called off this case at once. If he is working to find us by the day after to-morrow we shall cease all communication with you, and your children will never be returned to you."

There was no signature, and the letter was excellently expressed.

There was no indication of illiteracy on the part of the kidnapers, and either the men who had taken the children were educated Italians, who were also versed in English as in their own tongue—or they were not Italians at all.

"What am I to do?" asked Sabino. "Really, Mr. Carter, I am inclined to go behind you and the police, and to pay the money. After all, it is little to pay for the safety of my two children."

"Yes; very little indeed, if only it would secure their safety. But don't you understand that you would constantly be called upon to pay more?"

"I suppose so."

"Your children, one or both, would be kidnaped again and again; if not by these same men, then by others, who would not use them as well as now appears to be the case; by other men, who would regard you as an easy mark, because you had already paid over ransom."

"I understand."

"Leave it a while longer, at any rate."

"But it has been so long now; so long a time."

"I know."

"What was it that you wished to see me about, particularly, Mr. Carter?" Sabino asked.

"We have discussed it once before. Then you told me that you thought the men who had stolen your children could not be Italians. I did not agree with you, although I admitted that others might be con-

ed in the thing with them. But this letter seems ear out your theory—that they are not Italians." I do not think they are. I have no enemies among own people."

"Well, this is the point that I wanted to ask you ut, and I want you, please, to tell me the exact th, if anything at all."

"I will promise you that, Mr. Carter."

"I have found out this much, then—and the wording this letter substantiates it: I have found out that least two women are concerned in the kidnaping, are probably with the children now; and this is question I want to ask: Sabino, has anything pened in your life which would lead you to suppose t the jealousy of some woman may be behind this, well as the desire for money?"

For a moment Sabino stared at the detective; then replied:

"Yes. It is barely possible. I can tell you about it a few words."

CHAPTER VI.

A BIG WOMAN AND A LITTLE WOMAN.

"There was a young woman," said Sabino, "half ian, half American, to whom I was engaged to be rried before I met my present wife. The engage- nt was broken off because—well, it was because I faith in the lady, if you will accept that explana- n. Afterward, I met my present wife, and we were rried. The day before the wedding I received a tten message from my former fiancée, which said the four words: 'You will be sorry.' Afterward married—a man named Hawley, I believe."

"Hawley?" said Nick.

"Why? Do you know such a man?"

"No; only I listened to a story, not long ago, in ich the name was used. I was remarking upon the incidence, that is all. Go on, please."

"That is all. She married a man named Hawley, d went away somewhere in the West. I do not know ere, and I have never heard anything about her ce that day to this. But I have thought of that ssage many times, because I know that she was one to threaten me idly."

"Why do you know that?"

"Her mother was Italian, and of a very vengeful ture; she came by it honestly, although her people re of good family. Her father was—well, not al-

together what I would call a gentleman, although if he were living he would be surprised to think that anybody had that idea about him. That is all there is about that."

"So, now, if this woman should be mixed up in it, she is a Mrs. Hawley. What was her given name?"

"Cecilia."

"And the name of her husband?"

"Was Hiram. And she had three brothers. I had forgotten that. They never liked me, although they did like my money."

"Give me their names."

"Donald, James, and William Clarke."

"Now, you have heard the description that we have of the four men who carried the little ones away; they were very meager descriptions, of course, but would they answer to the descriptions of any of those four men?"

"I don't know that, Mr. Carter. The descriptions were altogether too meager for me to form an opinion as to that. Simply that the men were dark, all but one; and that two wore mustaches, and two did not; and that they were neither tall nor short, fat nor lean. I cannot identify a man by such a description."

"Of course not."

"Cecilia had one brother, Donald, who was a blond; and one sister—Carla."

"Was Cecilia a very large woman?"

"No. Her sister Carla was a large woman. Quite overlarge. As a girl she was so fat that it was a joke."

"Well, was Cecilia what you would call quite small?"

"Yes. What the French would call petite. Quite small; and she was very dark, like her Italian mother. Her father had red hair, as I remember it."

"Thank you."

When Nick left the house, he remembered what Jack Rabbit had said about the big woman and the little woman; and there had been four men engaged in the affair of the kidnaping, two of whom had gone through the woods with the big woman and the small woman, and two of whom had probably returned the stolen cars to New York, and abandoned them where they had been found.

Of course he understood that Jack had read those signs from the size and the depth of the impressions made by their feet; but it was a coincidence, taken in conjunction with what Sabino had just told him, to say the least.

Not one of his assistants was at home: Ish Chief and Patsy were out of the city, and Ida Jones was en-

joying a vacation, so Nick had no one with whom to discuss the events of the day.

Adelina, Patsy's wife, sat in the library with him for a time, after dinner, and one of the questionus she asked was as to what had become of the Indian, whom she had not seen, but whose presence in the house as a guest had been mentioned to her.

"Oh, I left him over in Jersey, on the case," replied Nick, laughing at the recollection of the things that had happened that afternoon.

"On the case?" asked Adelina, in surprise. "Do you mean that he is assisting you?"

"Yes." And then, from the beginning of that afternoon's experience, he related the whole story to her.

"Perhaps he is right, after all," she said, when he had concluded.

"How could he be right? You might just as well try to lift this house as to pry up that rock."

"Perhaps there is a way of getting under it without lifting it," she suggested.

"No. I thought of that. I looked all around it."

"And in front of it, over the edge of the cliff, too?"

"Yes; as well as I could."

"How well could you do it?"

"Not very well, I'll admit. It is a dizzy place, at least. I could only lean over the top of the cliff while Jack Rabbit held onto my ankles. But, you see, he was so dead sure that those men and women could not have gone away from that spot in any other direction than through the rock without leaving some sign of it that he could find, that he believes that that is the way they did go."

"Isn't it possible that he may be correct about it, after all?"

"No; I don't see how it is possible. I'll admit that it is funny, how they got away from the rock, after getting upon it once, without leaving a trace anywhere; and that is the circumstance that makes Jack so set about it."

"Maybe he is right," Adelina repeated again.

"It's nonsense."

"You are going over there to-morrow morning, to take food to the Indian, are you not?" she asked him.

"Yes. I must do that. The fellow would stay there, and starve himself to death, if I did not. Really, I ought to have gone back there to-night, I suppose. But it will serve him right to go hungry, for his stubbornness."

"May I make a suggestion?" she asked, after a pause.

"Certainly."

"You will go in the car, of course, when you do won't you?"

"Yes. It is the only way to get there, with walking or driving."

"First, then, will you take me with you? Just the fun of the thing, I mean. I would like the ri and to be with you, too, of course."

"Oh, yes, you may go, if you like."

"Now for the suggestion: You said there wa stunted oak, near the cliff, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, will you take with you, in the automob a lot of rope, long enough to reach far down the f of the cliff—and some blankets or quilts?"

"Blankets and quilts? What in the world fo Oh; I see. You mean to let the rope over the ed of the cliff, and to use the blankets to keep it fr chafing. It isn't a bad idea, Adelina, although it about as foolish as Jack's. All right; yes; we take them."

"And—will you rig up some kind of a sling, which you can tie me——"

"Tie you?"

"Yes. I want you to let me down over the edge the cliff, and let me examine it."

"Are you crazy?"

"Not quite; and at home, in Chile, I have often do that very thing, in the mountains, when we w searching for eggs among the cliffs. I know exac how to rig a sling with a good stout hammock. W you let me do it?"

"Yes; you can do that; but as for letting you do over that abyss? Why, Patsy would shoot me if supposed I thought of such a thing."

She laughed.

"Well, then, I'll compromise," she said. "Get another man to go along, so that he and Danny will strong enough to handle the rope when you go dow

For a moment Nick looked at Adelina, with his ey narrowed, and the suspicion of a smile on his face.

"Look here, Adelina," he said, "are you trying be funny? Are you trying to make game of me, j because you've caught me alone, for once?"

"No; honestly; I'm in real earnest," she said. "Wh you have told me about that Indian has impressed wonderfully. I am convinced that there is somethi in it. Leave a woman's intuition alone for that."

"Well, I'll tell you this much, Mrs. Garvan: There not going to be any third man in that little breakfa party to-morrow morning; not so's you could noth

If I am going down over the edge of that bluff, looking for a way to get under a flat rock that is several times larger than this house, I'm not going to give the whole city of New York there to look on and grin. I'll do it because you want me to do it, and because it should not be said that I left a single point unexamined; but—oh, nonsense."

"But just suppose that you should find that stone in the crotch of the tree, when we arrive there, in the morning?" she asked.

"Why not suppose that I find the two kids there, and the two men and the two women, holding out their hands and begging us to take them home?"

"I know some kids that they'd be glad to have taken home again after they had had them for a few hours," said Adelina, with a smile. "But, just now, I am interested in that Indian. Won't you tell me about him?"

"There isn't any more to tell. He is a Ute that I once knew on a trip to the West. I was after the Kid Curry gang when I ran across him, down in southeastern Montana; and that is away out of his own country. He was a young buck, then, just feeling his oats. But Nick is an unusual Indian; very intelligent, and very much of a man, too."

"Educated?"

"Yes; some. He went to school out there, somewhere. He has adopted our costume, and he has made some money. He got a special act passed for him, permitting him to own cattle, and he now has quite a ranch of his own."

"Men like that ought to be encouraged."

"I have never heard that anybody has discouraged him. It wouldn't be safe to do that—not quite. There is a lot of Indian in him yet; and he certainly is the greatest trailer that ever happened. I thought I was fairly good at it, for a white man; but you should have seen him reading those signs, over there, to-day. It was wonderful."

"He told you about the big woman and the little woman, and when different ones carried the children, and all that. It must have been interesting."

"It was; and anything that Jack tells you, like that, you can depend upon. He won't say anything at all, unless he knows what he is talking about."

"I hope nothing will happen to him to-night," said Adelina.

"What could happen to him over there?"

"Those men might throw him over the cliff, you know."

"Nonsense."

CHAPTER VII.

THE SECRET ENTRANCE.

They started as soon as it was light in the morning, for Jack Rabbit's appetite could not be expected to wait in patience till the regular breakfast hour.

At the four corners they drove along the side road a little distance, and then found a place where the ditch could be crossed, and the car was driven into the woods until it was sufficiently screened from view from the road, to be left to itself.

Nick and Danny carried the rope between them, and Adelina brought up the rear, chaffing them about it; but their laughter came to a sudden stop when they came in sight of the rock, and discovered that Jack, the Indian, was nowhere in sight.

Nick dropped the rope and left Danny to carry it, alone, the remainder of the distance to the rock, while he ran on ahead; and Adelina followed him, as lightly as a fawn.

He did not need to tell her what had happened, for he stood beside the stunted oak, staring at the piece of rock that was lodged by the hand of the Indian, in the crotch of the misshapen tree.

Adelina was the first to speak.

"There," she said. "I think, now, I have a right to say, I told you so."

"But you did not tell me so," said Nick, trying to smile.

"I told you that he ought not to be left here to be thrown over the cliff."

"So you did. The first thing is to see if he is down at the bottom of it—for it is just possible——" He stopped.

"What is just possible?" Adelina asked him.

"I don't know, my dear. Most anything seems possible now. If it were any other person in all the world than Jack Rabbit, I would say that it had been done purposely; but being him, I can't say that. There isn't a practical joke in his make-up."

"And he meant all that he told you about the sign he would leave here for you, too, didn't he?"

"He certainly did. He was very much in earnest."

Adelina was studying the condition of the tree.

"There is no other sign there," she said. "He has not broken off any of the branches."

"No; I looked for that. Come, Danny. Help me with this rope; but, first, hold onto my ankles, while I look over the edge of the cliff."

Long and earnestly he peered over into the abyss below, toward the broken rocks that lined the shore under

the bluff, but he could see nothing there, more than he had seen the preceding afternoon.

Shaking his head, he arose, and carried one end of the rope to the oak, and began winding it around the trunk—after he had peeled away the bark in order to create a smooth surface.

"Now, Danny," he said, "this is not going to be an easy job for you to handle alone."

"Well, I am here to help him," said Adelina.

"So you are. Now listen, both of you, and I will give you your instructions, which I want you to follow to the letter."

"I'll do that," said Danny.

"First I shall carry this end of the rope, that has the sling attached to it, to the cliff, and drop it over, so that the rope will rest upon these blankets, at the very edge. I will drop the sling down about twenty or thirty feet—perhaps less—and then, Danny, I will go down, hand under hand, to the sling, while you hold the rope where it is wound around the tree."

"All right, sir."

"And you are to hold it there until I give you a signal to lower it. You see, I will have to return, hand over hand, anyway, because you two could never draw me up, in the world."

"Yes, sir. I think we might do it, though, if the rope wouldn't chafe off. But, when we pull up, the blankets will be hauled out of place, you see."

"Yes."

"But when it goes down, Mrs. Garvan can lie down there, close to the edge, and hold fast to the blankets, so they will hold."

"Oh, I can come up the rope all right, when I am ready; if I can't, I can slide down again, to the sling, and you can lower me all the way to the bottom; and I am not sure that I will not ask you to do that, anyway, before we are through."

He stripped off his coat, waistcoat, collar, and tie.

"Now, Danny, you know how to manage that rope, don't you?"

"Yes, sir. I have done the same thing before."

Nick turned to Adelina, who was looking badly scared.

"Don't get frightened, my dear," he said to her. "I'm all right."

"Be very careful," she said tremulously.

"Sure," he laughed. "You see, just before I start, I've got to admit one thing; and that is, that, nonsensical as it seems, I must admit now that Jack Rabbit has either gone through that rock or under it. He said that would be the case, if I found that stone in the tree, and I did find it there; and he would not deceive me about it. I know him well enough for that."

They made no reply, and he continued:

"I know that he could not go through the rock. I know, as well as I know anything, that he could not get under it from the top of the cliff, and so there is only one way in which it could have been done, and that is—over there;" and he pointed downward.

"Here goes," he said, a moment later, as he seized the rope; and in another moment he had disappeared from their view.

The detective swung downward very slowly indeed, examining the face of the rock as he did so; but he could discover nothing, in those first moments of descent, that interested him.

Several times, as he swung around on the rope, he looked below him, half expecting, yet, that he might discover the mangled form of the Indian among the broken rocks down there.

Finally he reached the sling that had been rigged at the end of the rope, and he swung himself into it and rested.

It was a dizzy height at which to be hanging in mid-air, but Nick did not mind that, for he had long ago accustomed himself to such things.

While he rested, he looked up, and saw the face of Adelina peering over the edge of the rock at him.

"Go back," he called to her. "I am all right."

"Seen anything?" she asked.

"Nothing yet. Go back, away from that cliff."

She obeyed him, and he permitted his gaze to travel slowly down along the face of the cliff, to the spot where he hung. He found nothing.

Then he let his gaze travel slowly up the cliff again toward the top, five or six feet farther to the south.

Again there was no result; and so he repeated the experience, time after time, until he felt that he had thoroughly examined every part of the cliff between him and the top of it, for a distance of fifty feet, at least, toward the south.

He reached out one foot and turned the sling so that it would face the other way, that is, toward the north; and he began the same thing again, the same method of examination.

We, who have followed him through his experience, know that this was his favorite manner of examining the interior of a room in which a crime has been committed, when in search of some sign that the perpetrator of it might have left behind. He was employing the same methods now.

But he searched and searched along the face of the liff, until he had gone as far, he thought, as he could o it thoroughly; and he was on the point of return- ig to the top of the bluff, and finding another tree, arther along, which could be used as this one had een, when his attention was suddenly arrested.

He did not know just what he had found when he ift his gaze stop and linger at a certain point. He ould not tell yet; only that the character of the rock, t just that spot, seemed different from the surround- dgs.

There was a large, oblong square of it that was dif- erent.

It was not the same color, being darker in hue, and here seemed to be an unusual growth of verdure round it.

It seemed to him, as he looked, that bushes and reen things grew out of it where they had no right o grow. As if it was not quite natural—and now he as looking for anything that might appear to be at ll unnatural.

He studied the place for a long time in silence, wish- ng that he had a pair of binoculars with him, that he ight see it the better; and he tried to remember if here was another tree, back from the cliff that was irectly over that spot, that could be used for the ope.

But he could not recall having seen one there.

He started himself to swinging in and out, from he rock, away from it, and toward it, to see the bet- r, if possible—and then, once when he swung in to- ard the face of the cliff, he suddenly seized upon ne of the projecting stones, and clung there, hold- ng himself as tightly as possible to it—and almost olding his breath, too.

For he had seen something at last; something that as almost unbelievable.

The top of that darker section of the rock that he ad been watching moved outward from the face of he cliff, so that it formed one-half of an almost verti- al V, leaving an apperture that was perhaps a foot ide, between the top of it and the rock itself.

While he gazed, startled by what he had seen, he eard the voice of a man, calling; he plainly heard he voice say:

"That'll do. That is far enough;" and the thing topped where it was.

Nick did not dare to move, lest movement on his art should attract attention to him and so discover im to those people, whoever they were; so he clung ith all his strength to the piece of rock, and waited.

He hoped, too, that Adelina would not venture to look over the edge of the cliff, just then, and not see- ing him, get frightened, and call out—for she would not have been able to see him then, where he hung, close to the cliff.

Then he heard another voice from inside the open- ing in the cliff; and this time it was unmistakably the voice of a woman. It said:

"I tell you there isn't any one there. There isn't a sound. That Indian——"

That was all.

The opening in the cliff closed up tightly, resuming its former aspect, and no further sound from the space behind it reached the detective.

Beads of sweat stood out upon his forehead; not from anxiety, but from eagerness.

He loosed his hold upon the stone to which he had been clinging, thus permitting himself to swing out- ward again; and then, without waiting to send up any signal, he began to ascend the rope, hand over hand, and with all the strength and agility he could muster.

He gathered, from what he had heard, that some sound from the top of the cliff had apprised those people in the space behind the rock, whoever they were, that others were near them; and that the opening had been made in order that they might listen, to know who it might be; and he did not want to be discovered in the vicinity at just that moment.

Nor was he long in making the top, and in climb- ing over it, for Danny called Adelina to the rope at the tree as soon as he discovered the detective rising above the rock, and hurried forward to his assistance.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DEN UNDER THE ROCK.

The first thing that Nick Carter did when he climbed over the brow of the cliff to the top, was to put his fingers to his lips as a sign of silence, and then to turn and grasp the rope and pull it up on the cliff top.

Motioning to Danny to assist him, they coiled the rope, removed the blankets that had been used as fenders, and carried every scrap of material they had brought there, back into the woods, out of sight.

In the meantime Adelina followed them about like a terrier dog, consumed by curiosity—as well she might be; but it was not until the detective had seen that everything was out of sight, and they had withdrawn

to a safe distance from the flat rock, that he consented to speak, and tell what he had discovered.

Even then he spoke in a low tone, as if he was afraid that his voice might be overheard—and indeed, since he had found out that there were people underneath that huge rock, there was no telling what means they might have at hand for overhearing whatever might be taking place aboveground.

"You were right, Adelina," were his first words. "Jack Rabbit was right, too—and I was wrong. There are people under the rock, and, of course, they are the kidnapers. Also, there can now be no doubt that the stolen children are there, too. It is up to us now to find a way to get at them—which will not be an easy matter, I'm sure."

"What is it? What did you see?" Adelina demanded.

"Nothing at all, at first," he replied. "If some sound that we made at the top of the rock had not reached them, and alarmed them, it is doubtful if I would have discovered the fact that there is a secret entrance to their den, out there, on the face of the cliff. At least, I would not have found it when I did. I might have done so later."

"But what is it?" she insisted.

"Just a hole in the rock; probably a natural one, originally," he replied. "But, whatever it was in the beginning, they had artificially closed it; and they have painted and festooned their artificial door, so that it looks so much like the surrounding rock that from a little distance the eye would not discover it."

"A cave?" asked Danny, greatly interested. He had not yet outgrown his boyhood love for the mystery of anything by the name of cave. Doubtless that is a legacy from our cave-dwelling ancestors, but every boy has it, or has had it, at some time; and every man remembers it, too."

"No," said the detective, in reply to Danny's question. "The formation of the rock about here is not the sort where caves are found."

"Then what is it?"

"Probably a fissure in the rock, originally small, but through which water has found a way of escape, and through which, for many years, water has flowed, when the snow melts away in the spring, when violent storms occur, and whenever there are freshets."

"I don't quite understand," said Danny.

"Well, back yonder on the hill, somewhere, there is probably a stream, or the bed of a small stream which now may be utterly dry; but which, at times of freshets, fills to its shallow banks. Somewhere along that bed of a stream there has been, or is now, a small fissure through which the water, when it reaches a certain height, escapes, without all of it following its regular course. Do you understand that?"

"Yes."

"Years ago—possibly only a few of them, and probably a hundred or two hundred years ago—the overflow of water began to work its way through the small fissure. Constant dropping will wear away stone, you know."

"Yes."

"So, little by little, particles of slate—for that is the formation—have been washed away and carried along through the first small fissure. As time passed, this space became larger with each year, with each access of water. Wherever the water has found a particle of rock that was softer than the surrounding stone it has washed that away, and carried it along, until an opening has been made through the very face of the cliff, for it to escape to the river. See?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is probably what that retreat is."

"Just a little bit of a place, eh, not fit to live in?"

"It may be a little bit of a place, as you say, and may have been washed out all these past ages, until it has become high and roomy, at certain parts of it. We cannot tell as to that, Danny. There is only just one thing that we may safely assume, in connection with it."

"What is that?"

"That back of us, somewhere on the hill, there is a place where the water enters."

"Then we have only to find that——"

He stopped when he saw the detective smiling broadly.

"Danny," he said, "you might better look for the proverbial needle in a haystack."

"Why so?"

"Because"—Nick swung one of his arms in a circle around him toward the hills—"the place that I have mentioned may be anywhere within that radius, and if a thousand men were to seek for it for a thousand days they might not discover it, even at that."

"Well, then I don't see——"

"More: the entrance to it—where the water first enters, I mean, may be so small that a tabby-cat could not crawl through it—and it probably is very small."

"Then I don't see how any of it would be big enough for men to stay in, and for women to keep house in," said Danny, with supreme disbelief.

"Think a moment, Danny. There are places, no doubt, where the water has stood for years; places where it has been held in check, and where it has swirled around with each storm and thaw, until it has washed out roomy spaces. There are probably other galleries where it has tried to force out other channels, but which end in pockets, from which the water that accumulates in them from time to time gradually leaches away."

"So it is a cave, after all."

"Yes; it is what you might call a cave—only it isn't exactly the same thing."

"Well, anyhow, it is near enough to it for what those kidnapers wanted."

"I guess there is no doubt of that," said the detective, smiling.

"What I want to know is how are we going to get into it," said Adelina, interrupting.

"You, personally, are not going to get into it at all, my dear," said Nick; "at least, not until those people who are now in it have got out of it."

Adelina tossed her head.

"Well, then," she said, "how did those kidnapers get into it? And how did they get the two women and the two children into it?"

"That is the question I have been asking myself ever since I discovered it," replied Nick. "They went in over the top of the cliff, of course—this time; but there must have been a first time, you know, and it couldn't have been done then—in just this manner."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that the probabilities are that the place was not discovered at this point, but at another one."

"At the place where the water gets in, that you were just talking about with Danny?"

"No; I don't think that."

"Will you please tell me what you do think about it? I am all eagerness."

Nick seated himself upon a stump that was near at hand; they had withdrawn far enough into the woods so that he had no present fear of being seen, even if one of the men from the den under the rock should appear at the top of it.

"If we look at the thing logically," he said, more to himself than to his companions, "we must first consider how such places are usually discovered."

"I know how the big cave at Louray was found," said Danny. "A farmer saw his cows sniffing at a crack in the rocks, and felt cold air rushing out of it. Then he investigated. Then he blasted the rock, and found the cave."

"Yes. That is correct."

"What were you going to say?" Adelina asked.

"Such places, particularly in a neighborhood of this sort, are usually discovered by accident. A man may be digging a cellar, to build a house, and encountering rock, blast into it, as Danny's farmer did—and so discover a fissure which he examines, and finds is of considerable extent. Then he does one of two things."

"What are they?"

"If he is thoroughly a practical man, he fills the place with pieces of rock, cements it tightly, so that water cannot work through it into his cellar—and forgets all about it."

"Well, then, if he is not thoroughly practical?"

"If he happens to be one of the imaginative sort—like Danny, for instance—he investigates. He finds that the fissure he has discovered is of considerable extent, and shows signs of being larger as it advances, so he digs away with his pick, perhaps does a little blasting, too, and finally uncovers a gallery, which he explores—and which eventually leads him to just such a place as this one must be."

"And then the whole world knows about it," said Danny, with disgust.

"If he happens to be the owner—yes. If he happens to be a workman, who is merely employed upon the excavation—perhaps not. Do you see just what I am getting at, Adelina?"

"No; indeed I do not," she replied.

"Well, I will tell you—you see, we have got to reason the thing out in a logical way, if that is possible."

"Yes."

"The man whose children have been stolen is an Italian; the natural presumption is that the persons who stole them away are also Italians, or are affiliated with Italians."

"What has that got to do with it?"

"Nearly ninety per cent. of the men who do work on excavations, these present times, are Italians. Italians have done our digging for us for many years, now. Irishmen used to do it, but Italians have taken their places."

"Well?"

"I am convinced that this particular hiding place was not discovered in the beginning from the entrance through the face of the cliff, out there, but from the other end—from the making of some excavation, such as I have described."

"But there isn't an excavation of any account within two miles of here, and has not been," exclaimed Danny.

"Yes there is; just one, and it is within a quarter of a mile of here; just over that rise of ground, yonder;" and Nick pointed toward the north.

"I don't understand," said Adelina.

"Over there, where I pointed, there is the ruin of an old-time hotel," said the detective. "I don't know how many years ago it was built; thirty, or forty, or even fifty, I suppose—and it happens to be the only thing of the sort anywhere near here," he added.

"Then, you think——"

"I think that I am going to make a search of that old ruin, and of the cellar under it. Years ago, when that house was being built, an Italian workman might have discovered such a fissure as I have described—and kept the secret. He may have followed it to the end, at the face of the cliff, and have made an entrance there, knowing that the hotel would close up the entrance he had found," said Nick.

CHAPTER IX.

MORE ABOUT THE SECRET ENTRANCE.

"But how would these fellows know about it?" demanded Danny; and then he added: "Chief, I suppose I am half a kid yet, but honestly, since I have known you, I have never been so interested in anything, as in this. Please tell me all about it, if there is time."

"There is time, Danny, because in telling you about it I am trying to work out my own ideas in regard to it, too."

"Yes, sir."

"As I have said, the only way to explain these things is the logical way. Now, it is not at all logical to suppose that these men who are there now found this place just at the time they stole those children. Rather, it was the fact that they knew about the place that suggested to them the idea of the kidnaping; because it was safe. Because they believed they could hide themselves and the children away in there indefinitely, and with perfect safety from discovery."

"Yes, sir; I see that, all right."

"Again, I have seen enough already, in the partial lowering of that door, to know that the place has been known a long time. The lowering of that door, as it was done before my eyes, has shown me that an expert mechanic has been at work there at some time, and that he was really a genius in what he undertook to do."

"Yes, sir."

"So the information that these men have used has descended to them from somebody else. And we may safely assume that the knowledge has descended from one to another—from man to man, and from time to time—in a family, for instance, or among a special gang of men; and there is no class of men on earth who are so given to such things as the Sicilians."

"I guess that's so."

"It is so.

"Well, the next logical point is that it was discovered by accident; that the discoverer kept the secret to himself, or among a chosen few, determining to use the place for a hide-out, if occasion should arise."

"Yes."

"If such a man made the discovery to-day, he would temporarily close the opening he had found in digging the cellar, and would go on with his work till the end of the day, as if he had found nothing; then at night, he would return alone, or with one or two or more of his chosen friends, and explore the place."

"I see."

"Three or four together would be very brave on such an exploring expedition; moreover, they would be skilled excavators; they would have tools with them, possibly some giant powder, too. If they came to impediments, they would dig them away, or blow them out—and so, ultimately, would reach the extremity of the fissure, at the face of the cliff.

"Now, they may have been weeks at that task, or it may have been accomplished almost at once. If it occupied a long time—such a long time that the cellar they were digging was completed and walled up in the meantime—they had to find another way of getting into their den where they were working secretly, and possibly they found a place where they could make one.

"We must suppose that when they did arrive at the opening out of the face of the cliff it was very small, because, if it had been a large opening, it would have before that have attracted attention from the river, and some venturesome boy would have gone there.

"So, the opening, when they found it, was small, doubtless a mere crack, a foot wide, or less, vertical or horizontal, as the case may have been. They would enlarge that by digging it out, or blasting it.

"We must assume that one of them was a mechanic of sufficient talent to manufacture that door that I saw, to make it so that it would look like the surrounding

rk; to make it double, and fill the interior of it with rth, in which the seeds of honeysuckle, and things that sort, that grow seemingly upon the face of ks, would find sustenance.

"The door—remember that I saw it partly open, om the top—could be somehow hinged at the bot- n. There is a lot of cedar around here, and cedar ver rots out. Cedar posts of which such a door uld be framed could rest in a knuckle joint hollowed t of the rock, and the whole thing could be moved and down with the strength of a child, if the proper justment of weights was applied to it.

"Being lowered, such a door would form a platform t over the space under the cliff—and the weights uld hold it in position.

"At night, it could be lowered, and there would be le fear that it would be seen from the river. The ttom of that door is not more than thirty feet under, below, the brow of the cliff, and it would not re- re great engineering talent to reach such a plat- m from it.

"But, in order to work such an entrance, and have it er ready for instant access, it would be necessary her to have a confederate always inside, waiting to them enter—and that would not be logical—or re should be a means of dropping that platform m above; from the outside; from here, or some- ere near where we are now."

"But you spoke of another entrance," said Ade- a.

"Again we must be logical, Adelina, and another rance, in constant use, would not be so."

"Why not?"

"Because the chances would be very great that it uld be discovered, if it were in constant use. For stance, Jack Rabbit would have guided me to it, as rringly as he led me to this place, if those men d women had gone to such a place. If there is an- er entrance than the one over the brow of the ff, it is never used, and the men are probably bound, der oath, never to use it, save under stress of great rgency. Now, let us ask ourselves a question."

"Well?"

"Two men and two women, having with them two ldren of tender years, came here, and went into that e. They went into it over the brow of the cliff. ey could have gone into it, under the circumstances, no other manner. Jack Rabbit was certain of that, ore he knew anything about it at all; I am certain of ow that I know what I do. There may have been another person waiting for them; inside the place in the cliff—and there may not have been; but it is safe to assume that there is not always somebody there, and it is not likely that there was any one there at this time. So the question is: How did they get into it, when they did get into it, with the women and the children?

"With rope and tackle? That is not logical, because of the women and children; and it is not logical for a man, under the circumstances, for he would have to lower himself outside of that door I saw, and lower it from the outside—and so there must be another answer."

"It is what you said a moment ago," said Danny.

"There must be a way of letting down that platform from the top; from here."

"Yes; and more than that, too."

"What more?"

"Some other way of getting down to the platform, after it is lowered, than a rope, or even a rope ladder. Women are not experts on rope ladders. Few men would care to go over the brow of that cliff on one."

"Well, what's the answer?" asked Danny.

"Why, the answer is that the same means that are employed to lower the platform into place from above provides a method of getting to that platform. Danny?"

"Yes, sir?"

"We have talked enough, and now we will get to work."

"Yes, sir."

"The first thing to be done is to send you and Adelina on an errand."

"I want to remain here," said Adelina.

"Well, you cannot. Take that just as I say it. You cannot."

"You are sending Danny away just to get me away, too," she pouted.

"At all events I am sending you away, and you must go," said the detective.

"Why?"

"Because, probably there are four men down there, in that place now. There were four who were concerned in the child stealing, and the other two, whom Jack and I did not trail to this point, probably returned after the others did so, and approached the rock by a different course. There are at least four men there now, and there may be more, for all I am aware of. Do you understand that?"

"Yes."

"They are child stealers, and therefore desperate

men; there is likely to be a fuss when I come up with them, and you must not be anywhere near it. Now, Danny?"

"Yes, sir?"

"I will write a note for you to take to the commissioner of police, over in New York. He will give you two or three men to bring back here, with you, and he will telephone to the authorities on this side of the river, to secure their assistance. We are not in the New York State or city jurisdiction here."

"I know, sir."

"You will take Mrs. Garvan home in the car, first. Then you will go to headquarters, and you will return here as soon as it can be done without too much haste. You will drive the car, and the men in it, to the spot where it is now, and if I am not there, awaiting you—say that you get back here by three o'clock this afternoon; you ought to be able to do that—you will find a note pinned to one of the trees there, directing you what to do. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir."

"Skip along, then. There is nothing more to wait for."

"What are you going to do in the meantime?" Adelina asked him, hesitating about starting out with Danny.

"I am going to do some prowling around this neighborhood," was the reply. "I shall go about through the edge of the woods nearest to the flat rock, shaking young trees, and doing other things of the sort which may discover for me the lever which works that secret entrance—or I may go now and investigate that old ruin, over the brow of that hill."

"I wish you would let me go there with you. It would be great fun."

"Nothing doing, Adelina; it is altogether too dangerous."

"Goodness gracious," she exclaimed. "We have forgotten all about poor Jack Rabbit."

"I have not," said the detective.

"What do you suppose has become of him?"

"I suspect that, just now, he is bound very securely, and is a prisoner, somewhere behind that secret entrance through the cliff."

"If those men have not killed him."

"Oh, no, I don't think they would commit any unnecessary violence upon him; and that would be unnecessary at the present moment. He has been wise enough to make his captors suppose that he came here alone, and he is depending upon me to find him, knowing that I would discover the stone in the crotch of th tree, and read correctly what it meant."

"But, think, if those men should venture out, o the top of the cliff, while you are here alone?" sh cried out.

"I only wish they will do so," was the reply. "Suc a thing would simplify matters wonderfully. No go."

CHAPTER X.

THE MAN ON THE ROAD.

Nick Carter spent an hour, after they had gone, i testing the trees near the top of the cliff, in searc of a lever that would work the platform of the secr entrance, knowing full well, as he did so, that such discovery by him would mean the immediate warnin to the men inside the place that their retreat wa discovered.

But that did not make him hesitate in what he wa doing, although, as he worked on and on, he finall came to the conclusion that there was little hope th he would find the secret of the mysterious entrance s

It will be remembered that he had arrived at th cliff with his companions soon after daylight; it wa shortly after ten in the morning when Danny and Ad lina left him there alone.

He worked among the trees till nearly noon befo he hesitated and seated himself to smoke, and to thi upon the problem.

When he arose, half an hour later, he started at on for the ruin of the old hotel—although, before he d that, he took one precaution against the thought th anybody might leave the den under the rock durin his absence without his knowing that they had go

First, with pieces of chalk, he drew several diagra on the rock of the game of hop-scotch—and eve man who reads this, who has once been a boy, kno what that is; his idea was to give the impression th boys had been there at play, in case any of the pe now in the den should venture out of it during h absence.

In that case, the noises that they had heard, whi had occasioned the partial opening of the door in t rock, would be satisfactorily explained.

Next, he took from one of his pockets a package powdered chalk which he had taken there with him th morning for a definite purpose, for, even at that tim the insistence of the Indian had made sufficient impre

g it upon him, so that he had resolved to sprinkle the powdered chalk upon the rock in likely places, knowing that it would receive the impression of feet that might be pressed upon it, and that it would also leave other marks for a short distance, if any person walked over it.

He sprinkled that around—not too much of it—in such a manner that it would be troddeu upon if anybody did venture out of the den; and then, well satisfied, he started for the ruin.

From the river, passengers on steam craft can see parts of that old ruin. There are no doubt many who have read this who have seen it. Just now, two of the chimneys are standing, and also sections of the walls. Close at hand much of the old structure is still there.

Everybody knows what such a ruin is like; how the interior of it is filled with bricks and stones, and charred bits of wood, and other things; and how grass and rank bushes grow and thrive, and how it finally becomes a place to be avoided.

It did not take Nick Carter very long to discover that several men with picks would be necessary to make any headway at all in such a place, and that it was useless for him to search farther himself. There was absolutely nothing there that he could do alone—and anything that he cared to undertake, just then, even if he had assistance at hand, with the theory about to suggest it.

But he began to reason again.

If the beginning of the fissure that led to the rock had been first discovered there, in the digging of that cellar, the secret entrance through the face of the cliff which was now used was nearly a quarter of a mile away—and the men who had found the place in the beginning must have been forced to find, or to manufacture, some other way to get into it than through the cellar, or through the face of the cliff, before that last-named means of entrance was completed.

He began walking in semicircles, each one a few rods in advance of the last one, toward the flat rock, looking under rock, searching mounds, testing young trees, examining old stumps and old trunks of trees, leaving not one thing untested that might, by any possibility, prove to be the "open sesame" of the secret; and at last he arrived within a few rods of the flat rock, not one whit wiser than when he started.

He seated himself for a few moments, then, to rest himself, and his cigar was half finished before it occurred to him to examine the condition of the chalk that he had distributed over the top of the rock.

He arose and went forward, reached the edge of the rock—and stopped.

Somebody had passed over the rock since he went away from it. He could see, from where he stood, several imprints of a man's foot.

He went forward cautiously, for a better view of the surroundings, and he could see where the man had stopped to examine the "hop-scotch" diagrams that he had left there—and he could imagine how that man had smiled to himself when he had come to the inevitable conclusion that it had all been done by boys, in play—for Nick had even left stones in some of the spaces; such stones as boys kick out of the spaces, while they hop about, in their play.

But he wasted a very few minutes there.

He could see enough of the traces left by the chalk that the man had tracked after him to know what direction the man had taken, and noting the general trend of it, Nick took a slightly different course, and started on a run toward the highway, half a mile or more away. He reasoned:

"The man would naturally go toward the trolley-car line, or toward the ferry, for there would be no conveyance awaiting him." And from where Nick stood one was about as near as the other, with the difference just a little in favor of the trolley.

He decided that he would take chances on the ferry out of it, and go there, for, at least, that would be the destination of the fellow—unless he was bound for Hackensack, or Paterson, or Hoboken, or Newark, to post another threatening letter to Sabino.

He stopped just long enough to scribble a note on a slip of paper. It read:

"Wait here, in the car, and keep quiet, till I come, if it takes all day and all night, too. Am on a trail."

Then he made just sufficient detour to pass the place where the automobile had been left that morning, and stopped there to fasten the note to the trunk of one of the trees.

Then he looked around him for an instant, to get his direction, pressed his elbows to his sides, lowered his head a trifle, and started on a run in a bee line toward the road that goes to the Fort Lee ferry.

Nick had no idea how long a time had passed since the man had started, but there was a chance that it had not been long, and that he might overtake and pass the fellow on the road to the ferry.

How would he recognize the man, if that should occur? Well, he could not do that, only by general

suspicion from his appearance, and from the fact that he would be afoot—unless he had caught a chance ride—and that he should be too well-dressed to be traveling on foot, so far from the ferry.

For the character of the letters that Sabino had received established one fact, Nick thought: that the child stealers were not of the ordinary laboring class, but were educated, and possibly well-to-do persons; as a matter of fact, that little information about the former sweetheart, that Sabino had told him, remained with the detective, and had made an impression upon him.

It was not unlikely, he thought, that Cecilia Hawley, and her sister and brothers, the Clarkes, were the kidnapers.

When he reached the highway, he ran the faster; but after he had gone a little more than half a mile, he heard the horn of an approaching automobile behind him, and pulled up.

Two men were in it, both in front; the tonneau was not occupied. Nick held up one hand, and the car came to a stop.

"I wonder if you would not give a chap a lift," he said inquiringly, and smiling with all the ingratiation of manner that he could assume. "You see, I am in a great hurry. I was running when I heard your car coming, and I am very anxious to get to the ferry as quickly as possible."

"Certainly," replied the man under the steering wheel. "Jump in." And then: "I'll let her out a peg or two, if you are really in a hurry."

"I am," said Nick; "in a very great hurry indeed."

Then he leaned back in the car, and folded his arms in satisfaction, as the big machine sped onward toward the ferry.

They made good time, too.

Twice they passed men who were afoot, going toward the ferry; once there were two together; the other time it was a man alone—and he had seemed on the point of hailing the car and asking for a ride, as it approached him, although he had changed his mind, and turned about as it drew nearer, and he made no sign when it passed him.

"That chap looked as if he wanted to ride, too," said the man who drove the car. "I was on the point of stopping and letting him get in when he turned away from us."

"It is probably just as well as it is," said the detective; and to himself he added: "I will wait for him at the ferry."

They passed any number of vehicles of various kinds before they reached the ferry finally, and in many of them there were men riding who looked as if they might have asked the privilege of the driver.

At the ferry at last, Nick thanked his benefactors and left the car.

"You might as well ride across with us," said the man. "I am going straight down Broadway, if you care to go farther with us."

"Thank you, no," said Nick. "I have to wait here for a time. I was afraid I would be too late when I hailed you, but now I am in ample time, I think. Thank you again."

Inside the ferryhouse, Nick sought a place of seclusion for a few moments, and made a few alterations in his appearance—just enough so that he would not be recognized at once by any person who had chanced to notice him along the road, or by one of the men from the cliff, if one of them had succeeded in getting a glimpse of him.

When he came out again, he passed outside the ferryhouse and waited in the open, watching the passengers who left each car as it drew up there, and waiting all the time for that man who had attracted his attention on the road, in case he should see no other person who seemed more interesting.

It was half an hour before he saw that man coming—and he had asked nobody to let him ride, although many vehicles had come to the ferry since the detective had been standing there, which might have given him a lift. Was it because he did not care to attract too close attention to himself?

The man had light hair, and was not tall. He had a smooth face, and Nick thought that there was a touch of the Italian cast to his countenance; in short, he might answer fairly well to the partial description of Donald Clarke, the blond brother of Cecilia Hawley, as it was given to him by Sabino.

True, the description of the four kidnapers said, that all were dark; but one of the descriptions had been supplied by a child, and the other by a frightened nursemaid, and so were not to be relied upon.

As the man drew nearer, Nick thrust his fingers into one of his vest pockets, and drew forth a Spanish steel pen, which he held concealed in the palm of his hand; and then, when the man was quite near, stepped forward quickly, and exclaimed:

"Pardon me, sir; just a moment."

The man came to a stop, in utter surprise to be thus addressed, and to see a perfect stranger bend forward and grasp at one of his shoes.

But when he would have spoken, Nick straightened up again.

CHAPTER XI.

DONELLO, THE CHILD STEALER.

When Nick Carter straightened up, he held the ked Spencerian steel pen between his thumb and refinger, before the man's eyes, and he was smilg pleasantly.

"Fortunately I saw it, sir," he said. "A sharpinted pen, like that, is rather a dangerous thing for e to have imbedded in one's shoe. You see, it might rk through, and make a very painful wound."

"Thank you," said the man dryly. "I didn't know it as there."

"Oh, I saw it plainly, before you were close to ." said the detective; which was quite the truth, for had glanced at it while he held it in his own nd.

But he had seen much more than that when he nt over that shoe into which the pen had supposedly en imbedded. He had seen there traces of powdered alk, and he knew, positively now, that the man had me from the flat rock.

Nick waited until the boat was in and the big door admit passengers to it had been opened. Then he igered long enough in the background, of course, to e the stranger go aboard the boat—and then he rted away toward that place where he had made first small change in his appearance, and hurried out the making of another one.

This time he destroyed all that remained of the ker change, and pulled a closely cropped wig of red ir tightly upon his head. He folded his soft hat d thrust it into one of his hip pockets, and from other one produced a golf cap, which he put over red hair—and he changed the figured tie he had n wearing, and substituted one of plain brown, aring no scarf pin, whereas formerly he had worn e.

Not much of a change, was it? And yet enough for purposes. The best part of it was that he acplished it in three minutes time, and went out upon boat just before the ferryman went toward the ding door to close it.

On the way across the river, he stood quite close the man he was watching, out on the forward k.

He was debating in his mind whether it would be ll, or otherwise, to arrest the man as soon as the t touched the New York shore.

But he decided not to do so.

The fellow could easily disclaim all knowledge of things that Nick would charge against him, and re would be no way for Nick to prove his assern.

The presence of chalk marks on his shoes might be ily accounted for, even if any of them remained by time they should reach a station house, or a magiate.

So Nick decided to let the man go his way, and to low him.

He walked straight up Manhattan Street to the subway, which is elevated there, stepped upon the escalator and was carried to the top with Nick Carter not five feet away from him.

They entered the same car, which proved to be on one of the express trains, and Nick sat down close beside the man. It was a much better position for escaping observation than in being opposite him.

At the Fourteenth Street station the man arose before the car stopped, and Nick waited where he sat until the train came to a standstill; but then he arose and hastened after his prey, for so he now regarded the fellow.

They went out upon the street at the east side of the avenue, and the child stealer walked rapidly eastward along Fourteenth Street—and he continued to walk until he arrived at First Avenue, where he turned south and, after a little distance, entered a barber shop.

Nick waited outside a moment, and then strolled into the place himself, believing that the man had not noticed him at all, since he had changed to the red hair, and the cap, and the brown tie with no pin in it. His clothes were of the nondescript sort that usually escape unnoticed.

But when Nick entered the shop the man he had been following was nowhere to be seen, and so the detective, since there was nothing else to do to carry out the part he was playing without discovering himself, stepped into the bootblack's chair, and ordered a shine, taking care to speak in English.

If he had got into a chair to be shaved, his wig would have given him away; as it was, he sat where he had a view of the entire shop, in which there were six chairs, and every one of them but the first one was busy.

One shoe had been shined, and the other one was half done, when the man of the flat rock and the ferryboat, who had had the marks of chalk upon one of his shoes, came from a rear room into the shop.

He now wore a white coat, and he was hatless; and he took his place at the chair that was not busy, and called out:

"Next."

A man who had been waiting for a shave entered the chair. Instantly there began a babel of rapid-fire Italian between customers and barbers on the one side and the evident boss of the establishment on the other.

One of the men, a customer, shouted in Italian from the farthest chair down the room:

"So you are back again, Donello"—and it occurred to Nick that Donello might be one method of Italianizing the name Donald. "We did not know what had become of you. You been away some time; no?"

"Oh, not so long," was the reply. "I have had a good time."

"Where have you been?" called another, this time from the adjoining chair.

"To my brother's, in Yonkers," was the reply.

"I haven't had a good shave since you went away; these other fellows here are no good at all," said an-

other one jokingly. "I hope you are going to stay here, now."

"No; I must go away again to-day," said Donello; and he added, as if to explain a slip that he had not intended to make: "My brother is very busy, and I am helping him out. I come to-day to attend to some matters here, and must go back to him to-night. But I shall be at home again, for good, very soon; in a few days, at most."

"You go again to-night? That is too bad. We have a game on for to-night, and we miss you, Donello," said the man who had first spoken to him. "Stay and play with us; eh?"

"It is impossible."

"Well, for a while, anyhow."

"No; I must leave here by seven, at the latest; perhaps before that. It is necessary."

Then the talk drifted to other subjects that did not interest the detective—and the man at his shoes finished them. Nick left the chair, paid the bootblack, and walked outside upon the street.

He took a car across town, got out at Fourth Avenue, and went into the Churchill House, there, where he knew that he would find a telephone booth; and from it called up police headquarters.

"I want to speak to Commissioner Blynn, or to Inspector Rush," he said, when he got the reply; and a moment later: "Hello, inspector. This is Carter."

"Hello, Nick. What's up now?" came the response.

"I want to know if you can find Ed Conroy for me; or if not him, Enright, or Royle, or anybody, in fact, whom you can spare for the rest of the day."

"Sure. What do you want?"

"I want one of your men to go to a barber shop in First Avenue, and find a fellow there who is the boss; keep tabs on him till he leaves the shop, at seven o'clock, or a little before that; then follow him until it is a sure thing that he has crossed Fort Lee ferry; and in case he does not cross that ferry, to shadow him till further orders."

"And if he does cross the ferry?"

"Let it go at that. I will know where he is going, in that case, and I will be there in wait for him. Only, if he should not go there, I don't want him lost sight of."

"Is that all?"

"Yes;" and then Nick gave the number in First Avenue of the barber shop, and also the name that was painted on the window of it.

"You don't want the man trailed, after he crosses the ferry, if he does cross it?" asked the inspector.

"No; because he might get onto it, and that would spoil everything. And I know where he is going, if he crosses the ferry. As I said, I will be there."

"All right. I'll see to it, Nick. What is it all about? Oh, the Sabino case?"

"Yes."

"Got 'em, Nick?"

"I think I will have them to-night; before morning, at least, if that fellow goes back there," was the reply.

The detective lost no time then in hastening back to the Jersey shore; and at the ferry one of his proverbially lucky chances happened to him. His own car, with Danny and two men from headquarters, drove upon the boat.

But Nick kept in the background until the boat had entered the slip, and then he went to the car and climbed into it.

"We'll talk after we get started," he said, to stop the asking of questions; but as soon as the car was rolling along the road he told them all that had happened since Danny left the vicinity of the flat room with Adelina.

"There isn't any doubt that there is another entrance than the one through the face of the cliff," he said, "but I can't find it. Wherever it is, it is clever concealed, and probably is not used at all, the egress through the cliff being all that is necessary."

"Well, then, what are you going to do?" asked one of the headquarters men.

"We have got to enter the place through the cliff," replied Nick. "We have got to hide ourselves all over the place, until this Donello returns, and then see how he does it; and it isn't going to be an easy or a pleasant job, either."

"It ought to be easy enough, once we see him do it, Nick."

"The trouble will be to see him do it, Bob. It will be night when he gets there. We do not know just where to conceal ourselves so as to obtain the best view of what he does to open that place, or to get to the men who are in there—signal to them, I mean. And he will be wary, of course."

"There are four of us, all told. We ought to be able to scatter over the place pretty well."

"Oh, it has got to be done. There are no two ways about that," said Nick.

"And in the meantime?"

"In the meantime—wait."

"What's the matter with using that rope that Danny says you've got there, and getting down to cases right away? We ought to be able to open that door, somehow, or to——"

"Out of the question," Nick interrupted him. "In the first place, I doubt if we could force our way inside; the door must be thick and heavy, and is probably securely fastened. And, anyhow, if it could be done, we would give the alarm in doing it, and then would get away from us by that other entrance which must exist."

"Danny has been telling us about the thing. Do you suppose the other entrance is at that old mill, Nick?"

"It may be anywhere, Bob. But the only way for us to find a way in, now, is to wait and watch for Donello, and then——"

"Follow him, eh?"

"No. Rap him on the head, and go in his place after the secret entrance is opened."

"Bully! I see it now."

CHAPTER XII.

OVER THE BROW OF THE CLIFF.

We are already somewhat familiar with the surroundings near the flat rock at the top of which the Indian, Jack Rabbit, had been so stubborn in his beliefs.

On the river side it was absolutely exposed to view; the nearest tree to the rock was that one to which the rope had been tied when Nick Carter descended, and from the discovery that proved the Indian's theory; and that was at least sixty feet back from the edge of the cliff.

Toward the north and south, for the full extent of the rock, which was more than a hundred feet, there was no tree at all, and even after the extremities of the rock they were sparse and few, and far between. Back of the tree to which the rope had been fastened—that is, toward the west—the woods began; but they began thinly, thickening up as one advanced among them; but more than a hundred feet had to be traversed that direction before one could be said to be sheltered from view.

The sky was clear, in fact there was scarcely a cloud to be seen, and Nick and his companions knew that a full moon would render the coming night nearly as light as the day.

Well, if the light of the moon would render it difficult for Nick and his friends to hide themselves thoroughly, it also would have its advantages in the fact that it would tend to make plain the actions of Donello, the child stealer, when he should approach the place to return to his friends under the rock.

It is a good rule that works both ways—sometimes.

The time was approaching four in the afternoon when the automobile was again among the trees in the woods, concealed from view from the highway, and for a time Nick and his companions remained seated in it, chatting together, after it arrived there.

But inaction was always one of the most difficult things for Nick Carter to be compelled to undergo, and after another half hour had passed he cast away his smoked cigar, and leaped to the ground.

"We will all be better satisfied if we have something to occupy our minds while we are waiting," he said, "so to keep you out of mischief—and myself, too—we'll be moving."

"I was just thinking," said the detective from the Central Office whom Nick had addressed as Bob, "that we might just as well be watching the top of that cliff, all the time we are sitting here. One of those chaps might come up on top, to get the air, you know."

"All right, Bob; you can do that; and you, too, Dan, if you like. Come along, and I will place you, but only on conditions that I shall make."

"What are they?" he was asked.

"That you will keep perfectly still where I place you; that neither of you will venture on the top of the rock, or nearer to the rock itself than I shall place you; and that, if you see or hear anything that is at all suspicious, you will turn tail and come after me before you attempt to do anything."

"You might as well make it all an order," growled Bob. "We were sent here under your orders."

"All right. Call it an order, and come along."

"What am I to do?" asked Danny.

Nick turned and pointed in a northerly direction; directly toward the old ruin, in fact.

"You are to walk right forward in that direction, until you come to the walls of the burned hotel, and you are to meet me there," he said. "If I am not there as soon as you are, you can snoop around the place in the meantime all you please."

He led the two detectives toward the rock, going cautiously as they approached it, and at last, when in plain view of it, stopped.

A black birch of immense size stood there, and near it were clumps of young balsam; and directly into the center of one of these he pointed.

"There is your place, Bob," he said. "Lie right down flat, in the middle of those young balsams, and keep your eyes on the rock, roving them from one end of it to the other, but watching more particularly that point there, where it is a trifle higher than elsewhere."

"Correct."

"The secret entrance is right under that point."

"May I smoke?"

"Oh, yes, I guess so; only be prepared to jam the lighted end of your cigar into that moist earth if you see or hear anything; and no matter what you see and hear, content yourself with watching. Don't do anything at all."

"No matter what happens?"

"No matter what happens. Come along, Dan."

The detective led the way to another angle with the high point of the flat rock, and found another place of concealment, not unlike the first one.

"This will be your place, Dan," he said.

Dan and Danny must not be confounded, by the way

"I suppose my orders are the same as Bob's; eh?" the man asked.

"Yes; just the same."

"We'll have to move up nearer to the cliff when night comes, won't we?"

"Sure thing. We couldn't see what was doing, from here. But, you see, there is always a chance that Donello might change his mind, and start earlier than he said."

"And there are about ten thousand chances that he was lying like blazes when he said it, and that he will start earlier—or later," said Dan.

"That is true, too;" and Nick was thoughtful for a moment. "Oh, well, I won't be absent very long."

"You are going to the ruin?"

"Yes."

"To search it for another entrance?"

"No; just to look around; just to kill time, in fact. I think I shall not be long. I have already looked that ground over, and it would take an army of diggers with picks to find an entrance to the fissure there."

He found Danny waiting for him, seated on a stone that had formerly done service as a step at one of the rear doors of the hotel; and Danny was examining something that he held in his hands.

"What is it?" Nick asked, approaching.

"This," was the reply; and Danny put three articles into Nick's outstretched hand; a stump of a cigarette, a stump of a cigar, and a new, clean, lace-bordered handkerchief that was very small, and that could have been possessed only by a woman.

"Where did you find these?" the detective asked quickly.

"The cigarette over there, by that red stone; the cigar stump over there, near that big thistle; and the handkerchief was clinging to that blackberry bush, yonder," said Danny. "One end of the cigar stump is still a trifle moist, as you see, and the cigarette stump doesn't look as if it had been lying out here very long. As for the handkerchief——"

"Not one of these things was here when I was here before to-day," said Nick.

"Then somebody has dropped them here since then?"

"Sure," said the detective.

"Some of our party, do you think, Mr. Carter?"

"It would seem so, Danny. It looks to me as if one of the women—perhaps both of them—and two of the men, came out for an airing, since I have been away, and have strolled over to the old ruin to look about them. Danny, my lad, we won't spend any time here. We will go right back to the flat rock, hide ourselves there, and wait."

"Say, Mr. Carter?"

"Well?"

"What's the matter with their having come out that other way, that you suspect, but do not know about?"

"Nothing, I suppose, when one stops to think about it."

"It would be the safest way, at this time of day, wouldn't it?"

"Perhaps so."

"Will you let me do something, please?"

"That depends upon what it is, Danny."

"You go on back to the rock and let me stay here."

"What for?"

"I just want to lie down and rest, behind that bunch of blackberry bushes, up on top of that heap of rubbish over there. May I?"

"You mean that you want to lie there, and watch and wait, thinking that something may happen; eh, Danny?"

"Yes, sir; until dark; or until it is very nearly dark. Then, if nothing has happened, I will creep along toward where you are, as still as a mouse. Oh, I won't let anybody see me."

"It isn't a bad idea, Danny. All right. You may do it. I will return to the rock."

"You don't think much of the idea, then, that there is another entrance here, and that the woman who dropped that handkerchief, and the men who dropped the cigarette and the cigar, came out of it this way?"

"Danny, I think there is another entrance, and that you may find it by waiting here, or I would not have sent to your waiting; but I don't think it can be from the inside of this ruin."

"Where, then? Maybe you can suggest a better place for me to hide."

"I think I can. Can you climb a tree?"

"Like a monkey."

"Suppose, then, that you get about halfway up in the top of that spruce over there."

"That's bully."

"From there you will have a fairly good view around you, and you will be rather well concealed yourself. Besides, people rarely look into the tops of trees when they are strolling around. It is about the last place that one will look."

"That suggestion reminds me of something," said Danny, starting toward his tree.

"Of what?"

"Well, when night comes, and we go on the watch over at the rock, what's the matter with me shinning up that oak that we tied the rope to this morning. I could see a lot from there—and it's going to be moonlight, you know. You see, sir, there ain't enough branches and leaves in that tree to hide you, or either of the others; but I could snuggle down so that I wouldn't be seen at all, even if they should look up, which they ain't likely to do, as you said."

"Very well, you shall do it."

"Thank you, sir."

"And now, Danny, Donello may take it into his head to start earlier than he said at the barber shop. He may figure to get here as soon as it is dark, and you had better come down out of your tree, as soon as the sun sets, and return to me."

"Yes, sir."

Nick left him then.

He approached the rock cautiously—and came to a sudden stop.

He had arrived within sight of it just in time to see the figure of a man disappearing over the top of the cliff, at the point directly over the secret entrance, and to see that there was some sort of a contrivance sticking above the shoulders of the man, by which he was making the decent.

CHAPTER XIII.

DANNY HOLDS TRUMPS.

Nick Carter waited just long enough to assure himself that the man who had disappeared over the edge of the cliff would not reappear, and that there was

not others of the party yet at the top of it, and then he hastened forward.

But he kept himself back in the woods, so that he was not exposed, and he hurried to the place where he had left the detective called Dan.

"See him?" asked Dan coolly.

"Yes. What did you see?"

"I could have winged him with my gun, but that wouldn't have done any good."

"Tell me what you saw?" demanded the detective.

"I saw just what you did; no more. Just the head and shoulders of a man. He stuck to his ladder all the time; didn't leave it at all. Just looked around, and, after two or three minutes, went down again."

"A ladder?" asked Nick. "I could not see what it was."

"Yes. Some kind of an iron ladder, I think, with a telescope arrangement, so that it will shove up and let down easy. I have seen the like of them before. There was a chap—an Italian-looking fellow he was, although he had an English name—that had a patent on one of that kind of ladders, who tried to introduce it into the fire department when I was over there; before I went onto the force. I thought it was a good thing, too; but the fire commissioner wouldn't even look at it."

"What was that Italian-looking fellow's name, Dan?"

"Clarke. James Clarke, with an e, he was particular to say, I remember."

"And, Dan, I have strong reason to suspect that there is a James Clarke mixed up in this child-stealing affair," said Nick. "I think we may venture over to the brow of the cliff and you may hold my ankles while I look over, and see what is to be seen."

But ten minutes later, when he got upon his feet, after looking into the abyss, he said:

"There is nothing. We must wait. I suppose that man came to the top merely to look around him, to see that the coast is clear; and if that is so, it is getting near the time when Donello is expected back again."

After that the time dragged all too slowly. Each five minutes seemed an hour of waiting.

Then the sun disappeared behind the tops of the trees, and the shadows deepened; and Nick began to look toward the direction from which he expected Danny to appear.

But the shadows deepened still more, and Danny did not come, nor did Nick now wish to leave the vicinity of the rock to go after him.

"Dan," he said, at last, "you are not very heavy, and you are not very big. Do you think you could shin up that oak out there, and hide yourself in the top of it, or among the branches, so that you would not attract attention?"

"Sure thing. Shall I?"

"Yes."

Dan left him, and climbed the tree. Nick, as the shadows deepened after that, drew forward, nearer to the rock, and presently found a deep hollow, into which he dropped and lay flat, waiting.

Nowhere was there a sound or a sign of human presence—even Iron Danny, who was mysteriously absent still—until after nine o'clock, and it seemed to Nick that he had been waiting very many hours, then, and the absence of Danny worried him, too.

But he dared not leave the place where he was to investigate. It might prove fatal to all his plans to be absent when Donello should arrive, as he was bound to do now, at any moment.

And even as he thought about it, his eyes wandering among the trees through which Donello was bound to approach, he caught the gleam of a light, like the glow at the end of a cigar, and in another moment he could plainly hear the sound of steps approaching the rock.

"Donello, at last," was his thought; and as the man was still some distance away, he ventured to utter a low whistle of warning to his companions.

A moment later, Donello, indeed, stepped out from among the shadows of the trees, into the moonlight that shone on the flat rock, and, without pausing, kept on steadily, directly toward the tree into which one of the Central Office detectives had climbed.

There he stopped, and for an instant Nick thought the man was looking upward, and that he had discovered the presence of Dan among the branches.

But it appeared that he was not looking up that far; and in another second Nick could see that he was reaching up—toward that very crotch in the tree into which the Indian had put the small stone as a signal to the detective.

Nick dared to rise slowly and cautiously to his feet, the better to watch proceedings; and then things happened very quickly.

Even where Nick stood, he could hear the unmistakable tinkle of a distant bell—a little silvery chime it was; and then he heard a crash, and saw the headquarters man who was in the tree drop from it like a stone, directly upon the head and shoulders of Donello.

Donello cried out—just once—as he was being crushed to earth; and Nick, as he ran forward, could see the butt of the pistol descend in the hand of the headquarters man, and Donello quivered, and subsided, stunned by the blow he had received.

Nick turned instantly, realizing that Donello had succeeded in giving some signal before he was struck down, and he ran with all speed toward the cliff at the point where the head and shoulders of a man had appeared only a little while ago, as it now seemed.

He wondered if the haste of the headquarters man had spoiled their opportunity, and even as he wondered, and ran forward, he saw the outlines of the top of a ladder appear against the sky, over the river.

Without pausing or hesitating, never thinking of the possibility that he might be precipitated into the gulf below, he ran forward and leaped upon the ladder, which was close to the edge of the cliff—and he was

conscious of the fact that his two men were running behind him, following.

Donello was forgotten for the moment, when Nick sprang upon the iron ladder; and he descended it swiftly, feeling, as he did so, that another had stepped upon it, too.

He looked beneath him, and he could see that some sort of a platform was stretched out to receive him when he should alight—probably the door, lowered from the top, and held in place by the same mechanical contrivance that had utilized the ladder.

When he was two-thirds of the way down, he could see that a man had stepped out upon the platform for the space under the rock, and was looking upward at him; and then Nick did the same thing that Dan had done in the tree—he let go, and dropped, taking long chances in doing so.

He landed squarely upon the man, and crushed him down, instantly, and then, using his fist, he struck just one powerful blow the instant he alighted upon the man. It fell under the side of his chin, and it knocked him out, too, but not quickly enough to prevent his uttering one loud cry.

Nick struck the man again, as he sprang away from him, and left him quivering; and then he dashed into the opening into the rocky hiding place, for he could see the glimmer of a light far inside.

He knew that Dan and Bob were directly behind him, following, but he paid no attention to them, for, as he passed into the silence of the cavern, he could hear the sound made by running pairs of feet, far in advance of him.

He ran on.

Presently he passed into a room where there was a light burning on a table made of boxes, and where, even in his haste, he saw that there was a roughly made bed, covered with blankets; and as he passed it, he glanced toward it again, and could plainly see the forms of two sleeping children, huddled there.

He ran on, knowing that the remaining kidnapers were making for that other entrance, the existence of which he had suspected, and determined to catch up with them before they could get to it, if possible; and he called back over his shoulders to his companions:

"One of you go back, and go to the old ruin, or toward it. They are trying to get away."

Then he ran on again, and on.

The way was very uneven, and he frequently stumbled, and several times he collided with projecting bits of rock, and bruised himself; but already he had fished into his pocket and gotten out his electric flash light, and he found the way with that.

Once he paused for an instant, to listen, and he could still hear the sound of people running; women, he knew, would not be able to make very rapid progress through such a place as that.

Most of the way was through a very narrow space, but now it began to widen, although the height of it did not increase; and then, when he thought he must have traversed at least an eighth of a mile, he heard:

"Halt, there, or we'll blow the tops of your heads off all at once."

It was the voice of Danny. It was followed by a scream, and then by another one, and by the voices of men, swearing; and then Nick came upon the scene in a lofty space in the cavern, and his light showed Danny in the act of busily wabbling the muzzle of a pistol in the faces of two badly frightened women, and two as badly frightened men.

"All right, Danny," he called out. "We've got them now. They can't get away." And then sternly: "Every one of you put your hands over your heads, and don't move otherwise."

Then Bob and Dan arrived; and then the handcuffs, and the affair was over.

The men and the women concerned in the abduction were the ones whom Nick had suspected since his talk with Sabino—Cecilia Hawley, and her sister, and her three brothers, Donald, James, and William Clarke; all half Italians.

Donello and James were found where they had fallen; one under the oak, on the rock, and the other at the foot of the ladder.

Jack Rabbit was found, securely bound hand and foot, in the same room where the children were sleeping. He, while watching during the night after Nick left him, had seen one of the men come to the top of the ladder, and go away through the woods toward the road, leaving the ladder in place; so he had put the stone into the crotch of the tree, and crept down the ladder—to receive a blow that knocked him senseless when he arrived at the foot of it. But he had pretended that he could speak no English, that he did not understand Italian, and had jabbered Indian at them, and so they had concluded that he was alone, and more than half-witted, anyway.

And Danny, from his hiding place in the tree, had discovered the other secret entrance to the cavern when one of the women returned, evidently to search for the lost handkerchief; but not finding it, she had returned—through a hollow tree that was not half a dozen rods from where Danny watched her. And he had followed—and once inside, he had waited for the attack at the other end, knowing that the men would try to make their escape through the hollow tree.

Lastly, the children were perfectly well, had received fairly good care, and were overjoyed to be returned to their parents, as they were, before morning.

Down at the ferry they met Ed Conroy, waiting. He had followed his man there, and decided to wait.

THE END.

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